Paños, Chicano Prison Art / Reno Leplat-Torti's collection
Press kit

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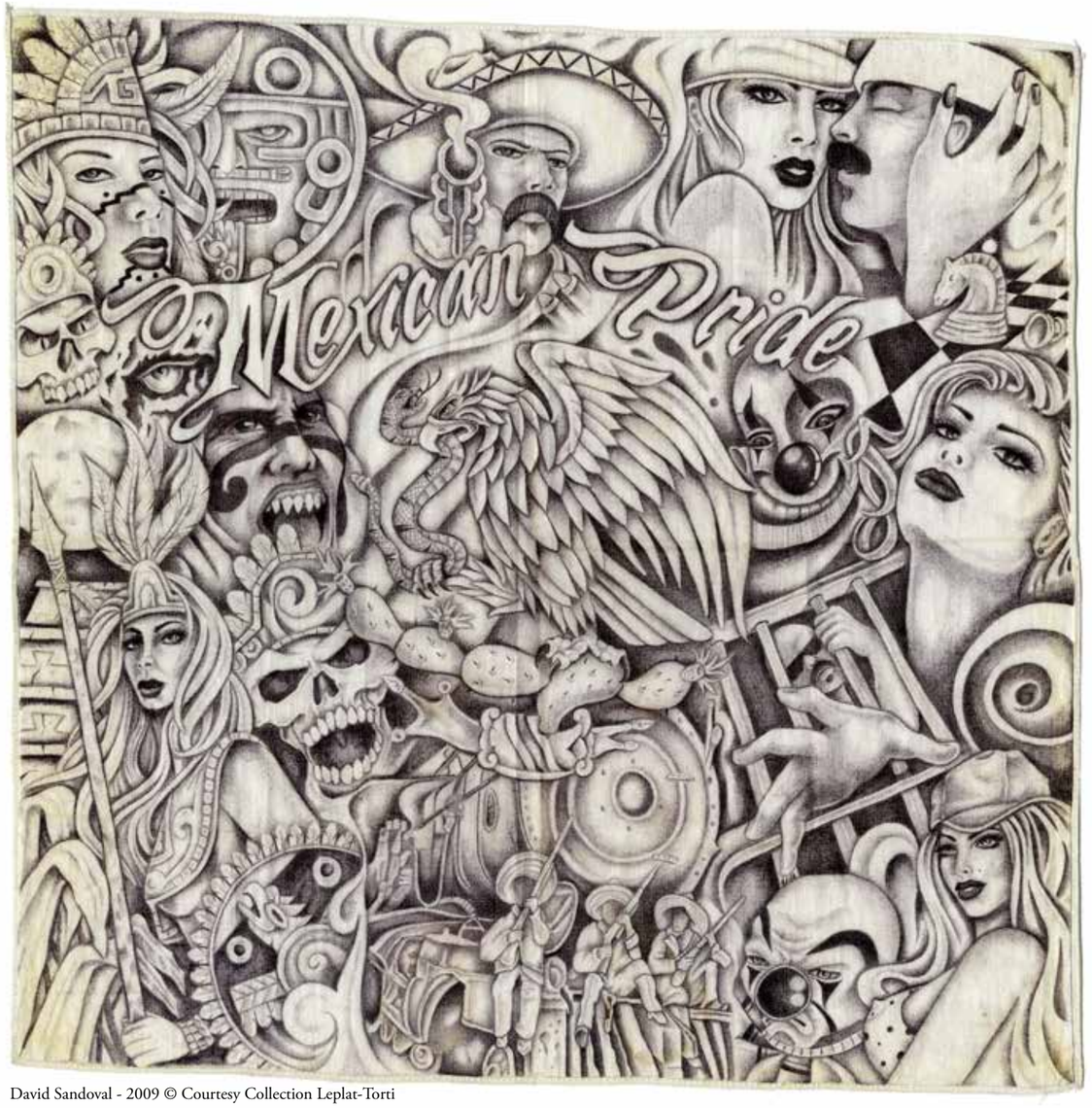

David Sandoval - 2009 © Courtesy Collection Leplat-Torti

Press release

The art of paño, diminutive of pañuelo («handkerchief» in Spanish), marginal folk art, appeared during the 40's in the prisons of Texas, California and New Mexico. Some fans believe that their origins in the French prison system set up in Mexico after the revolution of 1910. The detainees, usually from Hispanic origin, most of them illiterate, invent their own system of communication with the outside. On simple regulatory handkerchiefs assigned by the prison administration, they draw in pen with the recovered ink, wax or coffee. Thereafter, in the states of south-western United States this practice becomes a kind of prison traditional art and spreads to the rest of the country.

The inspirations of Chicano culture is very present : Catholic evocations or «vida loca» are associated with the symbols of the prison and love in all its forms. These different iconography are also found in the Chicano tattoos and murals. The paños sent to summon the children enjoyed the small pictures directory of Mickeys, plush, teddy bears.

Despite the precariousness of the means of achieving such transitional objects, they reassure and create the link beyond the bars, a way to contact the family, or members of the gang... These paños appear like the torn pages of diaries cathartic confessing feelings, emotions, thoughts and dreams hidden, witnesses of their lives in captivity through an aesthetic strength. A wealth of visual expression emerges from these tissues, a way to transcend the confinement and isolation, the endless passage of time and boredom, the loneliness of life in prison, where identity is subdued. Drawings of miniature paintings, stronger than words to recover humanity and dignity.

Isabelle Durand

Koka - 1992 © Courtesy Collection Leplat-Torti

Art from the inside

Paño Drawings by Chicano Prisoners
Martha V. Henry

Preface
"The sea and its sands weep what I suffer; the pen weeps as it writes black tears of sorrow." (**Las *décimas* de don Mateo**)

A letter arrives in a Chicano woman's mailbox. Sent by her husband who is serving time in a San Antonio jail, the envelope is decorated with a fine pen and ink drawing of the proud but sorrowful face of a Chicano man wearing a *moco* rag tied around his forehead and clown makeup under his eyes. The bandana identifies the man as a gang member, and the clown's makeup is a sign that he is masking his feelings. Framing his face are prison and religious symbols - a watchtower, a chain link fence, barbed wire, and a wooden cross. Together these images hint at the envelope's contents and the emotions that the inmate wishes to share with his spouse.

The woman opens the envelope and finds a neatly folded cotton handkerchief instead of a letter written on paper. Unfolding it, she discovers a ballpoint pen drawing expressing her husband's sadness about his imprisonment and separation from his family and friends. Not only does this pocket-sized canvas represent his personal thoughts from prison, it also elicits specific emotions from his wife about memories of the love they shared before he was incarcerated.

When words fail or are beyond reach, the visual language of paño art can convey stories and emotions that are understood by those who create and receive them. Chicano inmate-artists emphasize image and symbolism over literary communication. The expressive power of their imagery breaks through the prison walls and links the inside with the outside.

Origins
Although the origin of paño drawings is unknown, the art form probably emerged from jails and prisons in Texas, New Mexico and California during the *pachuco* –zootsuiter - movement of the 1940's when Chicano identity first crystallized. Throughout the 1950's and 1960's convicts risked punishment to tear up their pillowcases and sheets and make drawings on them with fountain pens that portrayed their experiences and expressed their feelings of doing jail time. Fountain pens were difficult to use because their points ripped the fabric, and consequently few of these early works have survived. By the 1970's prison commissaries stocked ballpoint pens and large white handkerchiefs with woven borders. Unfortunately the ballpoint pens penetrated the loose weave of these handkerchiefs and made the cotton canvases difficult to handle. In the late 1980's prison authorities allowed commissaries to sell smaller, more tightly woven handkerchiefs that were far easier to draw on. In the hands of the paño makers, these handkerchiefs became miniature canvases.

Sources
Paño makers in jail live in a world of limited visual inspiration. Some are inspired by the tattooed designs on their own bodies and those of other inmates. Most appropriate images from printed sources: lowrider, tattoo, soap opera and sex magazines; newspapers; calendars, posters and popular illustrations of religious figures, Mexican heroes and martyrs; comic and coloring books; and movie and burlesque posters. Each artist selects and preserves favorite illustrations in a file of personal images called *copias* that he will modify over time as his tastes change.

Copias are sometimes owned by specific prisoners. They are valued as commercial property because their owners can barter the right to use their *copias* with other inmate-artists or lend them with no strings attached. When a paño maker is released from prison, he either gives his *copia*s to another inmate-artist for safekeeping, or he lets them be used by anyone who wants them.

Paño making
The easiest paño to make is a colored piece. The artist selects an image from his *copias* and traces it onto a sheet of paper. After deciding which colors to use, he fills in the study's outlines by shading it with ballpoint pens, colored pencils or felt tip markers. The technique is similar to tattooing. Next he adjusts the scale with the aid of a hand-drawn grid. Once the drawing has been transferred onto the handkerchief, he repeats the process of filling in the outlines with color and shading.

To create a complex black and white paño an artist must exercise a much higher level of skill and visual organization. Again using a technique similar to tattooing, an artist composes a montage by transferring multiple *copias* onto the handkerchief. He juxtaposes images in varying sizes, all relating aesthetically and symbolically to a central image. The artist usually leaves the background ink-free to reveal the white color of the handkerchief. However, he sometimes uses *sobra,* a technique of stippling, shading or inking for dramatic effect that many inmate-artists admire but few master.

Other canvases
Although most Chicano prison drawings are made on handkerchiefs, inmate-artists draw on almost anything that they can find, including nylon commissary bags used for storage and laundry and envelopes purchased in the prison store. Despite the different formats, the style of drawing is the same as the handkerchiefs. However, the purpose of decorating a bag is to identify its owner and to prevent thieves from stealing it. Hand- decorated envelopes in color or black and white are used to mail letters and paños. The demand for them can provide a profitable business for a convict who is skilled in drawing. Popular designs include landscapes with sunsets, kissing swans, hearts and flowers, and prison subjects. An inmate-artist can make about six envelopes a week. In the prison barter system, two envelopes are worth a pack of cigarettes.

Themes
San Antonio's paño artists draw on a rich visual vocabulary of Mexican and American culture – high and low. Their work blends barrio art, like tattoo flashes, lowrider detailing, murals and graffiti; representations of Christian religious figures and Mexican heroes; and symbolic references to the prison experience of *tirando tiempo* - doing time. Paño makers generally use black ink for drawings that portray *la vida loca* - the crazy life of drugs and alcohol, gambling, prostitution and other crimes - and *viajes* - dreams, fantasies, nightmares, and drug trips. Colored pencils are usually reserved for religious, family and romantic subjects. Paño artists frequently use these images in iconic ways that are reminiscent of the narrative religious art of Mexico's Catholic painting and sculpture and the Pre-Hispanic pictorial writing traditions of Aztec and Mixtec manuscripts. Similarly, when reading some paños, the story unfolds from right to left. Paños also relate to the popular religious paintings on tin called *ex votos* that record miraculous events in the patron's life. Although paños sometimes include English or Spanish phrases, visual images usually convey their meaning.

Many paños have evocative elements woven into their compositions. Symbols of time and its passing are frequently represented. Clocks, hourglasses, calendar pages, tombstones, and numbered book pages all convey the relentless passing of time and the boredom of prison existence. Chicanos' pride in, and identification with earlier times is evoked by figures of a romanticized Mexican past, including Aztec warriors, Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata, and images of 1940's Texan *pachucos* and their antique lowriders. Images of the Virgin of Guadalupe and Jesus Christ copied from religious books and postcards and associated themes of suffering, redemption, and prayer are important in paño art. Love in all its aspects - familial, romantic, and sexual - are expressed symbolically with cartoons, hearts, ribbons, flowers and birds, or with explicit images derived from sex magazines and pornography. Illustrations of *la vida loca* are juxtaposed with prison symbols that include brick walls, bars, chain link fences, barbed wire, and watchtowers, as well as vignettes of cellblock life.

By using a rich inventory of images and combining them in graphically powerful ways, paño artists create windows onto their experiences, thoughts and feelings. The ability to tell both simple and complex stories that have meaning to both those in prison and those on the outside sets paños apart from other forms of prison art.

Mexican heritage and chicano identity
In the aftermath of the Spanish conquest of Mexico, Pre-Hispanic religion blended with Spanish Catholicism and enhanced Mexico's narrative and visual traditions. On the political front, multiple incursions and foreign rule altered the borders between Mexico and the United States. People living on both sides of the border developed particular cultural traditions centered on ranching with its own set of heroes and symbols.

Drawing upon their knowledge of history when making paños with Mexican or border themes, inmate-artists are able to share their beliefs and traditions with other inmates. Thus, prison becomes a school for the transmission of Chicano culture. *Copias* include scenes of Aztec nobles and maidens in architectural settings taken from Pre-Hispanic history and legends. An eagle standing on a cactus with a snake in its beak is the ancient symbol of the Aztec capitol of Tenochtitlan, the final resting place at the end of the Aztecs' migration out of Aztlán, their legendary homeland. Today it is Mexico's national symbol. The eagle and the snake, as well as the sun, symbolize Mexico in paño iconography, but along with the letters MM and the number 13, they may also represent the Mexican Mafia. Because of its gang connotations, Texas has outlawed some of this imagery. The Virgin of Guadalupe, patron saint of Mexico, symbolizes protection and Mexican identity, and she often appears in paños as a reassuring presence.

When depicting the heroes of the Mexican Revolution, the paño maker's source may be old *corridos* – narrative ballads celebrating the outlaw heroes of the border wars. Liberation figures, like Pancho Villa brandishing a sword or Emiliano Zapata wearing a *bandolera* – pistol belt - across his chest, are usually surrounded by images of the Alamo and beautiful *charras* – ranch women - who wear traditional sombreros with wide brims. While Mexican national symbols generally refer to an idealized past, border motifs are more often associated with reclaiming land, liberty, and dignity for the Mexican people. Chicanos' identification with their roots and culture is a profound source of pride and an affirmation of their heritage.

Chicanos are prisoners of their dual Mexican and American nationalities, yet they are alienated from both. Culturally, they are suspended between a motherland that they vaguely remember and a homeland that relegates them to society's margins. At the core of Chicano identity is *La Raza*, their shared ancestral experience of Mexico. In paño art, the search for identity and *La Raza* is expressed most often in *viaje*s, drawings that frequently portray Aztec warriors, Mexican Revolutionary heroes and *charras.* Artists usually frame them with peacocks, symbolizing pride and beauty, and roses, symbolizing passion and hope, designs that have similar meanings in both tattoo and paño art and are clearly statements of Chicano pride.

Lowriders, pickups and chicano pride
The lowrider is the most unique, flamboyant and enduring expression of Chicano pride and identity. These customized cars originated as an expression of *pachuco* style in the 1940's when Chicanos struggled against discrimination and poverty. In an era when ethnic minorities were expected to conform to Anglo dress code, *pachuco*s, much like today's hip-hop aficionados, defied the status quo by wearing zootsuits with baggy high-waisted trousers, oversized coats, wide-brimmed hats, long gold watch chains and droopy moustaches**. *Pachucos*** customized cast-off cars, called *bombas,* by chopping, lowering and dropping the frames **so they** hovered inches from the ground.
The automobile became a canvas for the expressions of its owner's dreams and fantasies. Cruising the boulevards "low and slow" while listening to their favorite tunes on the radio, *pachucos* in their lowriders embodied Chicano pride and ethnic defiance. Today lowrider culture is a worldwide phenomenon, but it is still "a uniquely expressive medium for Chicanos' continuing efforts to carve out a new kind of American identity while resisting assimilation."

Jesus Christ
Spanish Catholicism found fertile ground in New World Indians' love of ceremony and pageantry; the veneration of different aspects of gods; and the emphasis on pain and suffering as integral parts of religious life. Indigenous peoples, whose Pre-Hispanic religion included human sacrifice and ritual bloodletting, readily embraced the Spanish conquerors' Christian concept of a crucified Savior with bleeding wounds, a sacrificial death of terrible suffering, and a triumphant resurrection. Most Mexican rural people and their Mexican-American relatives still hold to traditional Catholic beliefs.

Paños depicting Jesus Christ and other religious figures are most commonly made for mothers, grandmothers and aunts and include messages asking for spiritual guidance and protection for the artists' families. Images of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary and the saints have a central position on the home altar. Family members pray to these religious figures to help them during crisis and to solve everyday problems.

Paño artists portray Jesus Christ in many forms. Favorite compositions include Jesus praying in Gethsemane, Christ wearing the crown of thorns, and the Crucifixion. Whichever composition they choose, Christ always symbolizes faith, hope, suffering and salvation.

The virgin of guadalupe
In 1531 Juan Diego, a Mexican Indian peasant, had a vision of the Virgin Mary at Tepeyac, a hill outside Mexico City and the original site of the shrine of Tonantzin, the Aztec Mother Goddess. Unlike the Spanish conquers' icons, Juan Diego's Virgin was dark-skinned and dressed in traditional Indian costume. She told him that she wanted a temple built in her honor.

To prove to the bishop that Juan Diego's vision was real, the
Virgin told him to gather roses blooming in winter from the rocks and wrap them in his cape. When he opened his cape to show the bishop the roses he had gathered, an image of the dark Virgin was revealed and the bishop was convinced of the truth of the vision. The Virgin's demand that a temple in her honor be built in Tepeyac was fulfilled by the construction of the shrine of Guadalupe, a pilgrimage church that thousands of devotees visit every year. Few realize that the shrine is built in the same place that the ancient Mexican Mother Goddess who ruled earth, fertility and sky was worshipped for centuries. Two hundred years after Juan Diego's vision, the Virgin of Guadalupe was declared the patron saint of Mexico.

This Virgin played a critical role in converting Mexico's native people to Christianity. Miguel Cabrera, one of Mexico's most renowned 18th century Baroque artists, painted her official portrait under church supervision and recorded the official details of Juan Diego's vision on his canvas. Cabrera's Virgin has been repeated in many formats since his original work, and frequently appears in slightly modified forms in paño art. Cabrera painted the Virgin larger than the sun radiating behind her and standing upon a crescent moon. The primary placement of the Virgin and the secondary positions of the celestial bodies show that her power is greater than the discredited Aztec gods. The designs on her robes include stars and roses that indicate her heavenly and earthly natures. Her hands held in prayer suggest her close relationship to the Almighty and emphasizes her role as an intermediary between human beings and God.

Today La Guadalupana is a living presence and an object of great devotion for Mexicans everywhere. As the Mother of God, she is sacred and associated with motherhood. She protects and comforts all living things. Her representation is found everywhere, even in local stores beside cash registers and on the dashboards of cars. More than any other Christian icon, she is the one who is asked to intercede on behalf of the family. People pray to her for strength and protection from evil. It is not unusual for Chicano men to wear tattoos of the Virgin of Guadalupe like body armor to protect them from harm.

Family
The family is the inspiration and source of much of San Antonio's Chicano folk art production. The rich variety of furniture, sculptures, textiles, religious and paper arts found in their homes creates an atmosphere of emotional closeness and gives visual cues to the social benefits of belonging to the family.

Paños are displayed on the *altar casero* - home alter -, a place in a room especially dedicated to worship and created and maintained by an older woman in the household. Along with prison art and religious icons, she

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Anonym © Courtesy Collection Leplat-Torti

may place candles, lights and Christmas decorations; family photos and pictures of popular heroes; diplomas, military medals, travel souvenirs, and other personal mementos. The *altar casero* is an expression of the woman's personal aesthetic and her attempt to influence supernatural forces.

Displayed at home alongside paños, are gifts of embroidered cloth given by a mother to her daughter or embroidered handkerchiefs with designs of hearts, flowers and ribbons with special messages from wife to husband. Paño makers sometime use designs that recall the embroideries they remember from home in the drawings that they send to their mothers, wives and children.

The family may frame his paños, discuss his artistic talent and proudly show his drawings to guests. Their affection for him can be measured by the care with which his paños are displayed at home. A mother can intuit her son's physical, mental and emotional health from the paños he sends her.

Giving paños to family members is a way for a convict to avoid being forgotten by them while he is doing time, especially if his sentence is long, and to reciprocate for gifts that they have sent him during his confinement. Paños provide a way for him to celebrate holidays and special occasions with his loved ones. If he has children, he may send them colorful drawings of funny cartoons and popular characters to make them laugh. He may painstakingly copy a message from a greeting card onto a paño with colored pencils to express love for his mother or wife. In many ways, gifts of paños can sustain the bonds of love and loyalty between inmates and their relatives on the outside.

Cartoon love

When a convict wants to send an affectionate message to his girlfriend or wife, perhaps to court her or to make up for a lover's quarrel, instead of sending her flowers, he may draw a cute cartoon to make her smile and forgive him. It may be a sexy rendition of Minnie Mouse or Betty Boop or perhaps a cartoon couple dressed up in barrio style. If the couple breaks up, she will dispose of his paño.

Whether or not the inmate is actually an artist, cartoon paños are so easy to make that they are a way for an amateur artist to develop his skills. He learns by tracing *copias*,
and after making a few paños, he may begin to receive commissions. His skills as a tradesman will develop through the challenge of executing his commissioned work. Eventually he will graduate from cartoons to black and white paños and be recognized as an artist.

The one I love

Once sentenced to prison, an inmate's physical intimacy with the woman he loves is limited by the jail's rules governing visiting hours. The couple is allowed to kiss when the visitor arrives and again when they part. They may hold hands for forty-five minutes above a Plexiglas barrier while guards watch them. At best the experience is awkward, without privacy and certainly no substitute for intimacy.

Given these limitations on their social interactions, it is not surprising that paño makers create black and white drawings of romantic and erotic fantasies for themselves and fellow prisoners. Inspiration comes from adult magazines like **Gallery,** with its risqué home photos of "girls next door", and from images of couples passionately kissing on the covers of Mexican romance comic books. Artists often frame the women and embracing couples with emblems of love and romance such as love birds or cockatoos, symbolizing courtship, building a family, and companionship; roses, representing love and passion; *charras* suggesting Mexican and border culture; or macho images of a man beside a beautiful girl driving into the sunset.
Such imagery expresses an inmate's loneliness at being separated from his life and relationships outside the prison walls and longing for women's emotional companionship. The hope that love's flame still burns in a lover's heart and the simple yearning to embrace the sweet memories of good times past are often recorded in paño art. Furthermore, paños depicting broken hearts or crying women can capture a prisoner's pain and help him cope with rejection and loss.

Valentines

Paño valentines expressing romantic love are sent as gifts to celebrate a wife or lover's anniversary, birthday and other special occasions. Hearts, kissing swans, butterflies, flowers, and written dedications convey his love and devotion.

The symbolism and the sources of these *copias* are found in older tattoo flashes. Not only is the imagery and meaning similar, in fact, the technique of making these kinds of paños is very similar to tattooing. A tattoo artist creates a stencil from a flash, transfers it onto the skin and then fills in the line drawing with ink shading. Freehand drawing is rarely done. In the same manner, a paño artist traces a line drawing from a *copia*, transfers it onto a handkerchief, and then fills it in with shading.

Tattooing is the most admired and widespread art form in prison. It has flourished behind prison bars despite centuries of bans; its imagery has been passed down to generations of inmates. Tattooing survives, perhaps, because it is an art of rebellion and an expression of individuality that becomes essential when imprisonment means the loss of identity.

La vida loca

La vida loca, the crazy life of the street with its lure of sex, gambling, drugs, alcohol, and crime, is a seductive lifestyle of thrills, pleasure and instant gratification. Unfortunately, many who live it end up imprisoned, beginning a cycle of addiction and incarceration that is a direct consequence.

La vida loca is the life of an outsider who is not living a normal existence. He lives on the edge of society following other rules. The origins of the outsider in *tejano* culture can be found in the old *corridos* that celebrated the outlaw heroes of the border wars, who were usually tequila smugglers, train robbers and illegal aliens looking for work. The famous lyric, "defending one's right with his pistol in his hand" was an outcry against the injustice these men fought against. But for some young men, that cry for dignity and self-respect became fused with the notoriety of drug dealers and other criminals.

Paño artists who record *la vida loca* always include in their work the consequences of the lifestyle with images of what has been lost by those who lead it. In Paul Nuñez's paño, La Vida Loca , a contemporary gang member is portrayed as a border outlaw with a smoking revolver in his hand. The meaning is reinforced by the Mexican flag behind the outlaw and by the beautiful woman protected by an eagle beside him. A U.S. flag symbolizes oppression and prison bars symbolize the loss of freedom resulting from *la vida loca.* In effect, these compositions are cautionary tales, warning *vatitos* – Chicano youths - about the dangers of street life.

Party girls

Paños of *la vida loca* often depict women as whores juxtaposed with *copias* of a magician or a serpent, both symbols of temptation. Identified by their large breasts and protruding buttocks, barely covered in see-through lingerie and stockings, they pose as dominatrixes and submissives, or engage in sexual acts. Portraying one's girlfriend in this manner is forbidden, but the anonymous women of pornography are acceptable models. Inmates lift *copias,* called hot dog or skin flicks, from sex magazines and embellish them. These drawings can be very explicit and the theme is always sexual fantasy. They provide convicts with female erotic images**,** a welcome diversion from the all male environment of prison.

Camaradas

San Antonio is one of the poorest cities in the United States. Poverty, discrimination and social pathology are rampant leading some young *vatos* – guys - to express their frustration and rage in criminal activities and street violence. Gang membership captures their imagination and desire to belong to a group in ways that school and society do not. The gang functions like a second family providing identity, structure, emotional support, and respect. Peer pressure sometimes leaves *vatos* with little choice but to pursue gang membership. *Camarada* – gang - philosophy can be summed up as 'they do for me, I do for them'. Whether on the street or in paños, *camaradas* can be identified by their gestures, style of dress, particularly their headgear – gangster hats, bandanas, knit caps and baseball caps with the brims turned up – and by their tattoos of gang affiliations, nicknames, barrios, religious icons, and cartoons.

Although social gangs are brought together by a common interest like lowriders, the gangs of *la vida loca* are violent. Organized like a corporation whose main business is drug dealing, the violent gangs also engage in prostitution and extortion. They use violence and weapons to expand their power into new territory, protect their home turf and preserve their status. Many members are incarcerated for their actions and in jail the gang cycle begins anew where membership in a prison gang of *carnales* – brothers - becomes crucial for protection and survival.

Drug life

The destructive and chaotic underside of *la vida loca* is drug abuse. Although using drugs is considered a weakness in Chicano culture, *vatos* are especially vulnerable to drugs because of social stress, gang pressures and the traditional prohibitions about expressions of pain. Some use heroin or other intoxicants to dull painful feelings and quiet their anxiety and then become addicted and commit violent crimes to support their drug habits. During incarceration they continue abusing drugs to escape the even harsher realities of prison life.

Vatos are not proud of these activities, so scenes of drug use in *la vida loca* and *viaje*
paños are usually hidden from the outside world. They are made for an inner circle of *carnales,* and out of respect, are not shown to women. Many symbols of drug use can be found in paño drawings: dragons, 8 balls, marijuana leaves, pills, mushrooms, spoons, syringes (drugs and paraphernalia); snakes (temptation); melting clocks and faces (effect of drugs); spider webs (addiction); and skulls (death). The artist often balances a central scene of drug use with images showing the pain associated with addiction and the devastating impact drugs have on families and lives.

Crime scenes

Paños often feature narratives of real or imagined crimes - street and bar fights, drug dealing, armed robbery, hostage taking, stabbings, shootings and murder. Sometimes the inmate-artists add small realistic details about the chase and arrest, like roadblocks, police beatings and handcuffing, sentencing, and jailhouse scenes of beat downs and other brutal acts committed by correction officers. However, without detailed investigation, it is impossible to know whether the acts portrayed actually occurred. Convicts tend to fantasize and exaggerate stories about torture, murder, suicide and other exploits, and paño artists record and embellish these stories for dramatic effect.

Sometimes in rehabilitation sessions, inmates are encouraged to create imaginary violent scenes of drug abuse and murder but they do them unwillingly, often to curry favor with the rehabilitation staff or prison authorities. In the past, some Texas correction institutions allowed these paños to be marketed through the system's art programs where there is a large appetite for violent images from a voyeuristic audience outside the prison walls. These commercial productions may reflect pride in craftsmanship but the affection for small details that traditional paños exhibit is missing. Marketplace imagery is chosen to catch the eye with appealing designs instead of personal emotional expression. Thus, the market subtly shapes the themes recorded on paños reflected by the artists' different choices of images and compositions from the paños that they send home to their families.

Cellbound

The United States has one of the highest incarceration rates in the world. Since the collapse of the oil business in the late 1980's, the number of prisons in Texas has increased more than sevenfold from 20 to 150. Although private prisons have become profitable businesses in many states, the governor is ultimately in control of the prison system and sets the tone for the wardens. Wardens run each facility like private fiefdoms and enforce their own sets of rules. However, it is the governor who encourages or forbids art programs and the flow of art supplies in jail and creates a supportive or hostile environment for the making of paños.

The war on crime and the privatization of prison facilities have meant that prisoners are serving longer sentences under harsher conditions than in previous decades. Dehumanization is the trend in prison governance, and the system suppresses an individual's identity in many ways. Inmates are identified by number. They are forced to conform to a standardized dress code, perform menial work and accept rigid schedules. They eat the same food, endure lockup in a small space, experience lengthy periods of inactivity, and receive brief periods of exercise and release. Convicts also endure enforced celibacy during their sentences. Prisoners are under constant supervision and surveillance, even when they are in solitary confinement. Human contact is limited to the wardens, correction officers, other convicts and occasional visitors. It is difficult to sustain friendships because prisoners are constantly moved around within the system without notice. The lack of privacy, constant noise, ugliness, monotony, threat of rape and violence causes overwhelming feelings of rage, fear, futility, boredom and depression. To escape such nightmarish conditions, inmates turn to games, fantasy, drugs, and suicide.

To survive in prison a convict must be physically, emotionally and spiritually strong. Hardness, anger and violence are encouraged; friendliness, gentleness and sadness must be hidden for fear that others will find an inmate weak. Projecting a tough, hard face is a requirement for survival in prison; masking emotions and hiding feelings are also necessities.

Variations on the mask theme appear frequently in paño art. Mocking jesters or a pair of silly clowns may imply foolish behavior, while a pair of sinister clowns may suggest false pretenses or worse. Comedic and tragic masks are sometimes paired with the phrase, "Smile Now, Cry Later", a fatalistic concept that good times will inevitably be followed by a period of troubles. However the masks are portrayed, the message is clear – the world is a chaotic place where appearances are deceiving and where feelings and true emotions are best masked from view.

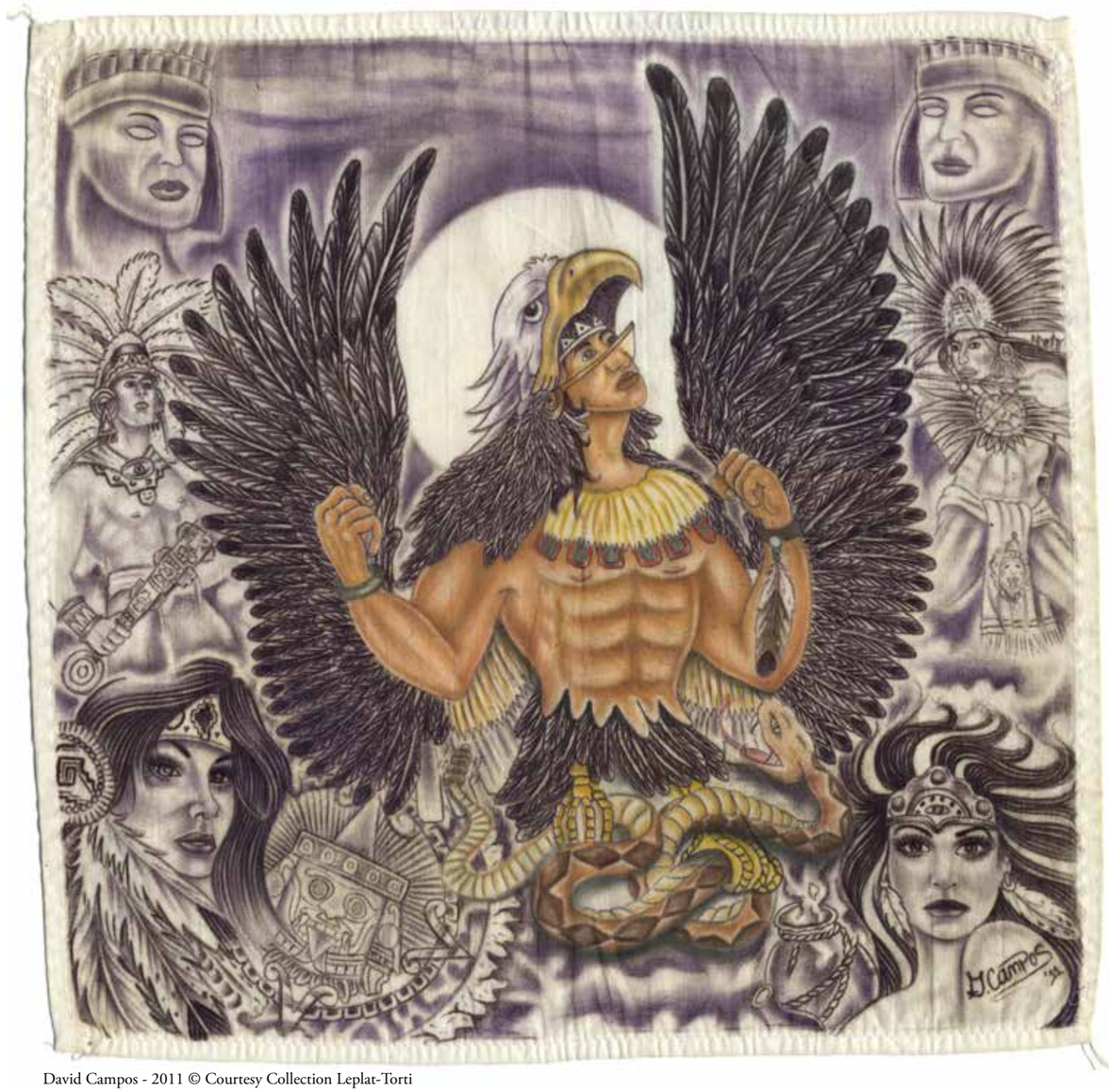
Artists in residence

Art is one of the best defenses an inmate has to cope with prison's dehumanization.

The grim reality is that a prisoner is stripped of everything that matters in his life except time. How he handles that reality is the key to how he survives incarceration. Prison routine is less depressing if he can find an activity that will make time pass more quickly and interestingly. Art's liberating fantasies not only allow an inmate-artist to mentally escape from his cell and wander the world of his imagination, it provides spiritual nourishment for his soul. It is an outlet for the expression of the pent-up emotions he has hidden from others in order to survive in such a hostile environment.

Chicano prisoners live by rules of conduct (pride, respect, patience, and heart) to insure that their interactions with other inmates are peaceful and to help them survive their prison sentences with some semblance of dignity. When they apply the same qualities to paño making, prison becomes a school for developing new skills and learning about their culture. In prison, they pass on art traditions and techniques through a system of apprenticeship to other inmate-artists. This training accounts for the repetition of images, symbols, motifs and styles in paño art. An inmate-artist earns *respeto* – respect – from his fellow inmates through paño making. He needs *paciencia* - patience – and discipline to draw with concentration and not make a mistake that could ruin his work. He feels *orgullo* – pride - from his artistic accomplishment and from his knowledge of his Chicano background. He feels *corazon* – heart – when he pours his emotions and passions into his paño's images. By practicing these qualities in art production, the inmate-artist's character is strengthened in ways that are crucial to his spiritual and practical survival.

The code of respect applies when judging or criticizing paño art. An inmate respects any paño drawing and never comments or even touches an artwork unless the artist asks him to. Unlike the practice of the outside art world, it is not polite to criticize or judge a work of art. If there are elements of gang imagery in the paño, they must remain secret and can never be discussed. Craftsmanship, especially shading techniques, is admired, but ultimately a paño is appreciated for how successfully the artist communicated *corazon*. Paño artists earn respect in prison by sharing their knowledge. If they are talented, they enjoy an elevated status. They are able to trade their art for goods and services insuring their practical survival. They are given cigarettes, food and drugs, telephone privileges and friendship. They also



David Campos - 2011 © Courtesy Collection Leplat-Torti

enjoy some protection against rape and beatings. There is pressure on artists to perform. They take pride in doing better work, and the chance to barter for goods and privileges may increase its quality and output. There is a sense of barrio cohesiveness, that "if you slack off, you will bring the others down with you."

It is not always possible to identify the true creator of a paño because of how it originated. Some artwork was commissioned and the patron's signature was added instead of the inmate-artist's. A commissioned paño is really about the patron's feelings rather than the artist's. It is like a greeting card where the sender signs his name rather than the card's creator. Sometimes paños are forged or stolen and the new owner attaches his name and quickly sends it out of prison. One deterrent to theft is to integrate a signature into a section of the picture that is too complex for the plagiarist to reproduce. In earlier examples of paño art, many artists did not sign their work at all because they were drawn for specific people who knew who they came from. Besides, individuality lay in the paño's story and not in the artist's name so a signature was unnecessary. Since the mid 1990's, artists have tended to sign and date their work as it enters the commercial art world. More paños are being made today for a commercial audience.

The marketplace's demand for hardcore subject matter has been increasing since the mid 1990's. Younger artists favor *viaje* compositions and the demonic imagery of drug-induced trips. As the artists compete with each other, they introduce more horrifying images and their compositions become more sophisticated and complex. These paños are intended for a voyeuristic audience, and their images are actually safe because they are not very personal. Like masks, they do not reveal the artist's intimate feelings. Recent paños have been criticized for lacking *corazon*, sentiments that are traditionally found in paños made by older generations.

Duality

The experience of duality is intrinsic to Chicano culture. Its origins are found in the Aztec principle of opposites – win/lose, man/woman, sin/redemption, life/death – and it is a major theme from the Pre-Hispanic past. It is evident in Chicano attempts to reconcile their Mexican and American nationalities, in the nostalgia they feel for *La Raza* and their expression of a new American attitude and style.

For Chicanos in prison who yearn for life outside, reality collides with fantasy and their experience of duality is intensified. To survive the prison experience, inmates project an emotionless public face to mask a private self that overflows with feelings. Such duality is expressed often in paño art by the written phrase, "Smile Now, Cry Later" and is suggested by pictures of masks and clowns.

The world of emotions that lies between these opposing states of being is the great theme of paño art. It is a world where every human emotion is exposed from faith, love, hope and dreams to regrets, longing, sadness, fear and rage. Paños are "tales of humanity flowing forth from a tragic source, yet behind the images are emotions that are familiar to all human beings." Whether they are love letters, narratives of personal loss or prayers for redemption, every paño tells a story.

"The reason I do art is to be remebered by my familia should anything happen to me while doing time. It is the only thing that I have to give of myself."

Manuel Montoya, août 1986

"Art is power. Like faith, it can change your life in a positive manner. When I take up my pen and put down my thoughts, feelings, hope and dreams, I have freedom."

Melvin Sedillo, février 1992

"The paño becomes the canvas of his soul expressing yesterday's sorrow and tomorrow's hope."

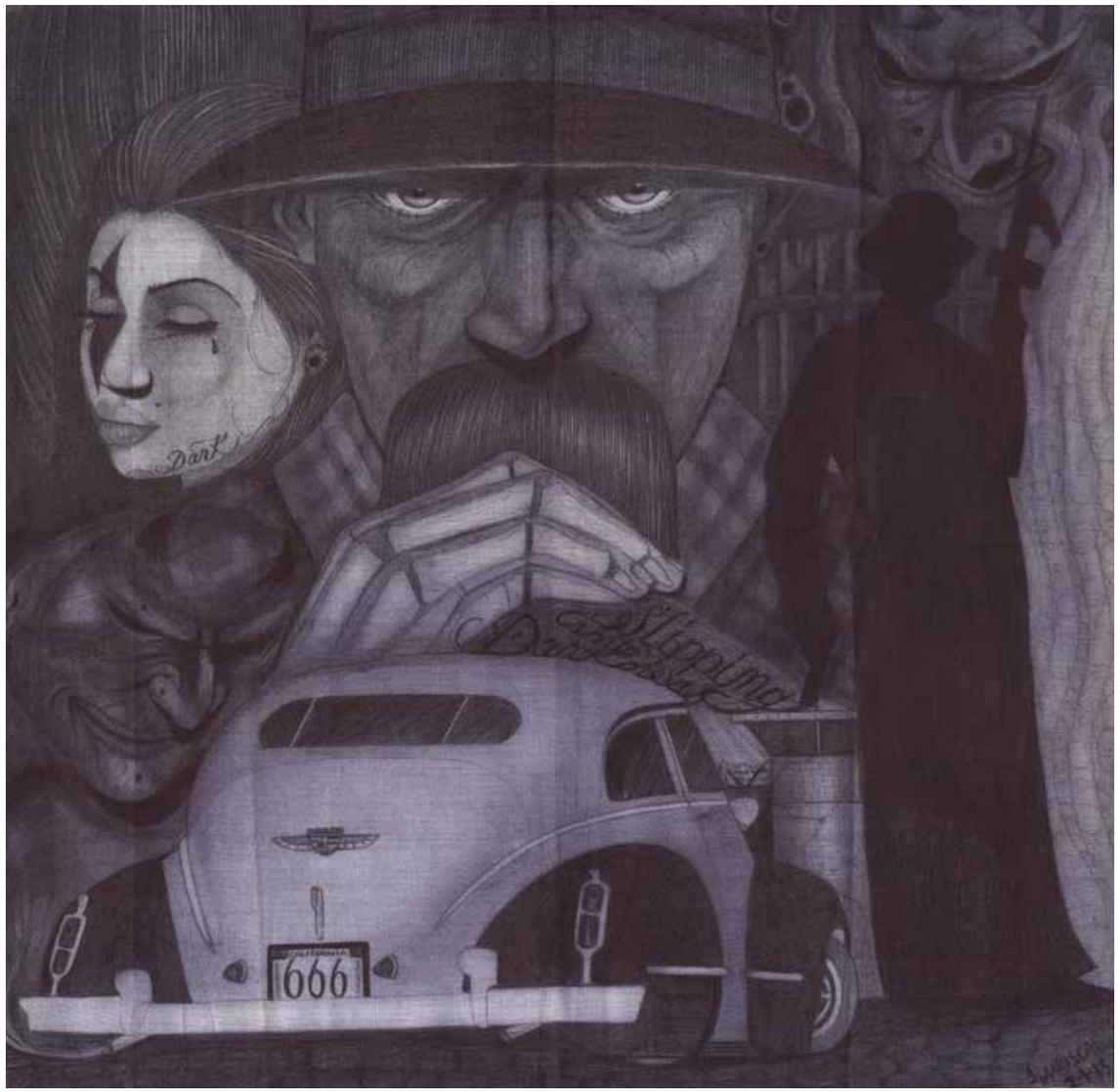
Rudy Padilla

Cannon Ball - 1934 © Courtesy Collection Leplat-Torti

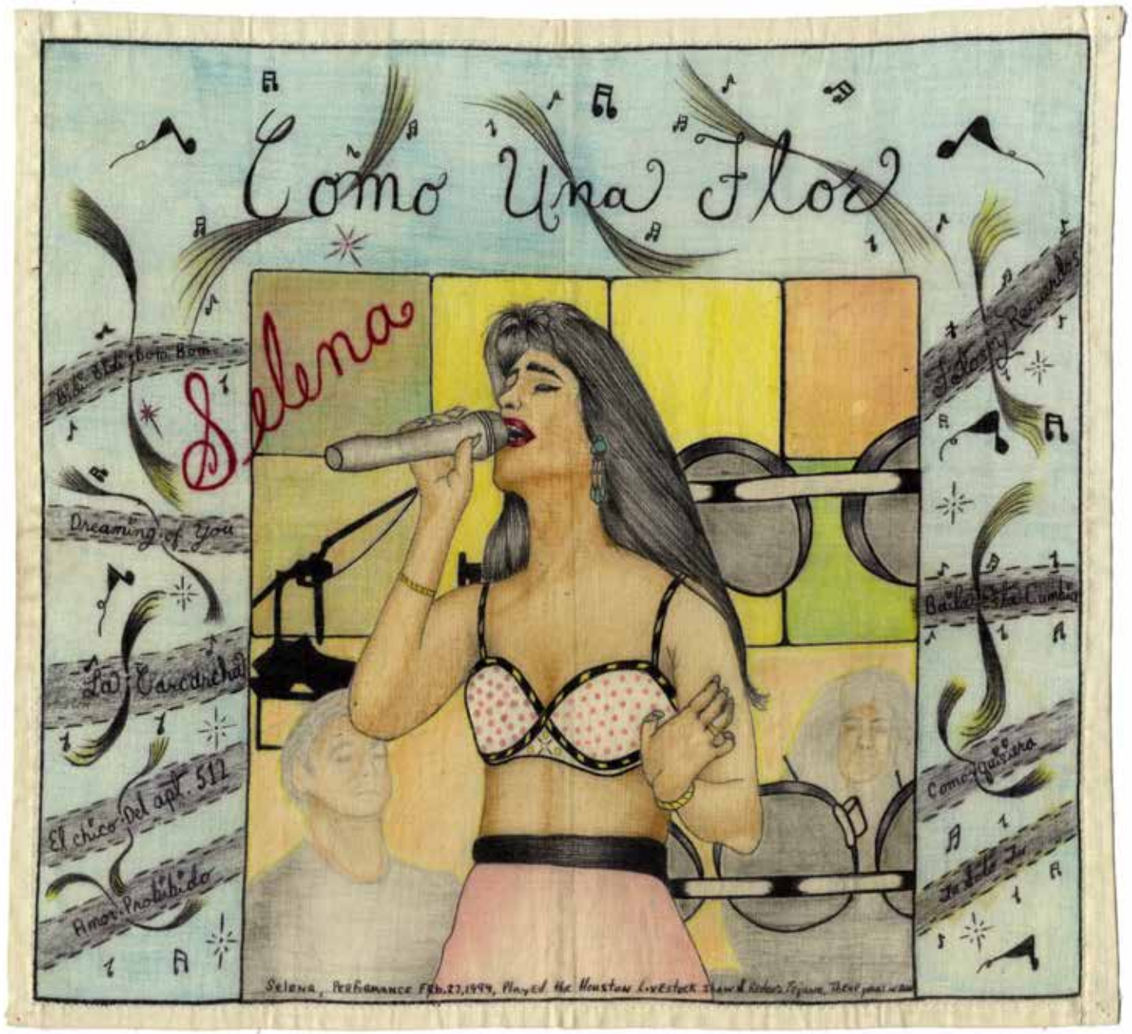
Justin Sturtevant - 2012 © Courtesy Collection Leplat-Torti

Anonym - 1934 © Courtesy Collection Leplat-Torti

Anonym - © Courtesy Collection Leplat-Torti



Anonym © Courtesy Collection Leplat-Torti



Anonym © Courtesy Collection Leplat-Torti

Anonym © Courtesy Collection Leplat-Torti

Rudy Treviño III - 2010 © Courtesy Collection Leplat-Torti

The exhibitions

MOHS gallery in Copenhague (DK) / January 2013

Le cri de l'encre in Lyon / Octobre 2012

MOHS gallery in Copenhagen (DK) / January 2013

Regional Contemporary Art Museum in Sérignan / April 2013

Le Dernier Cri in Marseille in partnership with the Pop Gallery and their ghanaian movie posters / May 2013

The exhibition Paños, Reno Leplat-Torti's collection has been presented at La milonga del'angel in Nîmes (FR) in october 2011, at Going Blind gallery in Grenoble (FR) en février 2012, at Monte en l'air in Paris in march 2012, at Cri de l'encre gallery in Lyon (FR) in october 2012, at MOHS Gallery in Copenhagen (DK) in january 2013, at Lycaon in Brussells (BE) in february 2013, at MRAC in Sérignan (FR) in april 2013, at le Dernier Cri in Marseille (FR) in may 2013, at ChantierBoiteNoire gallery in Montpellier (FR) and in From point to point gallery in Nimes (FR) in september 2013, at le Salon in Paris in april 2014, at Quai Branly in Paris in may 2014, at galerie Central in Liège (BE) in november 2014, at Libertine Gallery, Amsterdam (january 2015). Recyclart, Bruxelles (may 2015). U10, Belgrade (november 2015). Royal Museum, Toronto (may 2016). FITE, Musée Bargoin, Clermont Ferrand, FR (june 2016). Field Museum, Chicago (october 2016). La Jetée, Montpellier FR (march 2017). Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County (november 2017). Casa de Francia, Mexico (december 2017). Taco Ché, Tokyo (may 2018).Uplink, Tokyo (may 2018). Modern and Contemporary Latin American and Latino Art, Long Beach, Californa (august 2018). To come : Musée Confluence, Lyon. Musée International de la croix rouge, Genêve. Musée de l'hygiène, Dresde. Musée des Beaux-arts, Die FR (26). Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts,Taiwan.

Gallery From point to point / Philippe Panetier, in Nîmes/ September 2013

Gallery Chantiers BoiteNoire in Montpellier / September 2013

Quai Branly, Paris / Tatoueurs tatoués / may 2014

Le Salon Paris / april 2014

Galerie Central in Liège, Belgium. November 2014. © Dominique Bernard

Galerie Central in Liège, Belgium. November 2014. © Dominique Bernard

Press Book

Anonym © Courtesy Collection Leplat-Torti

Télérama.fr

EXPOS - PEINTURE - DESSIN - CIVILISATION

Holywoodoo et Panos

Note de la rédaction :

TT On aime beaucoup

Note des internautes :

☆☆☆☆☆

(aucune note)

Collision d'art brut sur les murs du Dernier Cri pour cette nouvelle exposition de la programmation *Mauvais Œil sur Marseille-Provence 2013*. Pendant des plafonds, des affiches de cinéma ghanéennes, peintes par des artistes locaux pour des vidéoclubs. Bras et têtes coupés, pasteurs zombies ou serpents gueules grandes ouvertes illustrent des films d'action ou d'horreur des années 80... C'est drôle, direct et sanguinolent.

En frise, juste en dessous de ces illustrations coup-de-poing, on tombe sur un tout autre travail. Celui, pointilleux et fascinant, des *Panos*. Les *Panos* sont des mouchoirs de coton blanc que les détenus chicanos utilisent comme toile, pour des compositions au stylobille, seul outil à leur disposition. Des pièces réunies au Mexique et aux Etats-Unis par le collectionneur Pascal Saumade (aussi propriétaire des affiches) et l'artiste français Reno Leplat-Torti. Messages aux familles mais aussi œuvres destinées à la vente pour aider les prisonniers à « cantiner », les *Panos* concentrent toute l'imagerie de la Mexican Pride – Vierges, crânes, aigle, révolutionnaires zapatistes… -, traitée avec un soin incroyable. Des tableaux miniatures souvent monochromes, à la maîtrise inégale, mais au sens toujours très aiguisé.

Gilles Rof

Grenoble

20 minutes

Les mouchoirs des prisonniers chicanos

Publié le 27 janvier 2012.

0 contributions

Exposition Going Blind présente une collection de paños

Des mouchoirs exposés comme des œuvres d'art. L'idée peut surprendre, c'est pourtant le thème de la très belle exposition « Quedarse ciego », accueillie jusqu'au 24 février à Going Blind. La galerie grenobloise présente ainsi une trentaine de ces paños. « Les paños sont des mouchoirs dessinés par des prisonniers américains, généralement chicanos (Mexicains émigrés aux Etats-Unis), explique Adrien Fregosi, directeur de la galerie. D'origine mexicaine, cette tradition s'est ensuite développée dans le sud-ouest des Etats-Unis. Les détenus se servent de ce support, qui fait partie de leur paquetage, car ils peuvent s'en séparer ou le faire passer facilement à l'extérieur. En dehors de la pure création artistique, ils utilisent en effet ces dessins pour communiquer avec leurs familles ou amis. Beaucoup les offrent à leurs enfants. »

Vendus en ligne

Les paños de « Quedarse ciego » proviennent de la collection de Reno Leplat-Torti, commissaire de l'exposition. « Il en a acquis certains grâce à ses contacts avec des prisonniers, d'autres via Ebay précise Adrien Fregosi. Les détenus ont en effet vite pris conscience des bénéfices potentiels. Ils envoient les paños à leurs familles qui les vendent en ligne. Ceci leur permet d'acheter de la bouffe ou des clopes en prison. » Les thèmes brassés sont très larges : « amour, liberté, enfance, guerre, soutien, déclinés en couleur ou noir et blanc. Il n'y a pas que les clichés sur les gangs latinos ou la Vierge. » Rendez-vous à Going Blind, 9 ancienne route de Lyon.

— **Manuel Pavard**

L'affirmation d'une identité

La tradition des paños remonte, selon les théories, soit à la guerre franco-mexicaine au XIXe siècle, soit aux années 1930-1940. Selon Pascal Saumade, coauteur du livre « Paños » (Ed. Le dernier cri), « ils dépeignent la vie dans le barrio, le temps qui passe derrière les barreaux et revendique la fierté du peuple chicano. »

LE PETIT BULLETIN
LE WEB DES SPECTACLES

Art carcéral

Entretien - portrait publié le Lundi 16 janvier 2012 Petit Bulletin n°827 consulté 389 fois
mis à jour le Mardi 17 janvier 2012

Commissaire de l'exposition Quedarse Ciego actuellement présentée à Going Blind, et co-auteur du livre Paños récemment paru aux éditions Le Dernier Cri, Reno Leplat-Torti nous en dit plus sur l'art méconnu des paños, né au sein des prisons américaines. Propos recueillis par Damien Grimbert

• Quedarse Ciego • galerie Going Blind • Reno Leplat-Torti •

Que sont exactement les paños ?
Les paños sont des mouchoirs dessinés par des prisonniers américains – en général d'origine chicano, même si ce n'est plus forcément systématique. C'est une manière pour les détenus, qui ne savent pas toujours écrire, de communiquer avec l'extérieur, que ce soit leur famille, leurs associés, les membres de leur gang... Ils utilisent des mouchoirs comme support parce que c'est ce qu'ils trouvent dans le « package » qu'on leur remet en prison. Et avec le temps, c'est devenu une sorte de tradition.

Depuis quand cette tradition existe-t-elle ?
Il y a plusieurs hypothèses. La plus probable la ferait remonter au début du siècle dans les prisons mexicaines, après la guerre franco-mexicaine. Elle se serait ensuite diffusée dans les Etats du sud-ouest des Etats-Unis, de la Californie au Texas, puis dans le reste du pays.

Avec quoi les détenus dessinent-ils ?
C'est variable, mais la plupart du temps, c'est avec un stylo parce que c'est ce qu'il y a de plus simple à se procurer dans l'univers carcéral. Après, on en a vu faits avec du café, de la cire de bougie, tout ce qui permet de dessiner.

On retrouve souvent des symboles récurrents sur les paños...
Comme le mirador, qui représente l'univers dans lequel ils évoluent, et souvent leur seul horizon. Après, il y a les paños envoyés aux enfants avec des Mickey, des peluches, des oursons. Le visage du clown triste symbolise le regret, la souffrance, celui du clown gai le fait de profiter de l'instant présent. Et il y a aussi toutes les références aux cultures incas, aztèques, mexicaines... C'est vraiment une pratique très codifiée. C'est un moyen d'exprimer leur affection à leurs enfants, leur amour à leur femme, mais aussi de communiquer avec les groupes à l'extérieur par le biais de codes assez variés.

Ces différents codes esthétiques se retrouvent aussi souvent dans les tatouages chicanos, les peintures murales...
Tout est lié, en fait, c'est ce qu'expliquait un des détenus. Quand tu as un atout, un talent en prison, tu auras forcément tendance à l'exploiter. Pour X ou Y raisons mais en général c'est quand même surtout pour obtenir un peu d'argent, un peu de popularité au sein de la prison, c'est vraiment le plus important. Donc les mecs qui font des paños, généralement, ne font pas que des paños. Ils dessinent aussi souvent des tatouages pour leurs codétenus, et ce sont souvent les mêmes qui réalisaient des peintures murales à l'extérieur. D'où cette esthétique commune.

Comment en êtes-vous venu à vous intéresser à cette forme artistique particulière ?
Étant plasticien à la base, j'ai un regard sur la création de manière générale, et je m'intéresse particulièrement aux arts populaires. Il y a quatre ou cinq ans, en glanant sur Internet des petits objets fabriqués en prison, je suis tombé sur des images de paños. L'espèce de puissance qui se dégage du sujet, de sa forme aussi, ça m'a vraiment percuté. J'ai tout de suite essayé de me documenter, mais à l'époque, c'était très difficile de trouver des informations.

De fil en aiguille, vous en êtes venu à correspondre avec deux prisonniers dans le Sud des Etats-Unis...
En fait les détenus envoient leurs paños aux familles à l'extérieur, qui ensuite les vendent en ligne. Ça leur permet de cantiner. Au fur et à mesure des contacts, des courriers, on finit par se parler un peu, se comprendre. Eux acceptent mon intérêt, d'un côté, ça les rend assez fiers et heureux que des gens puissent s'y intéresser. Mais d'un autre coté, ce n'est pas non plus évident pour eux de comprendre si je n'ai pas une espèce d'intérêt lucratif là-dedans, c'est vraiment à double tranchant. Ça prend du temps en tout cas d'établir une conversation avec des mecs comme ça, mais c'est aussi ça qui me fascine dans les paños, ce pouvoir qu'ils ont de créer un contact entre l'univers clos de la prison, leur famille à l'extérieur, et puis des gens comme moi à l'étranger.

Pour terminer, pouvez-vous me dire quelques mots de cette exposition à Going Blind, et du livre qui vient de sortir au Dernier Cri ?
Quedarse Ciego, c'est une exposition qui présente une trentaine de paños issus de ma collection. On l'a d'abord présentée à Nîmes avant de la montrer à Grenoble, et on va essayer de l'emmener à Lyon par la suite. Dans le livre, *Paños, Chicanos Prison Art*, on retrouve en grande partie la collection de Pascal Saumade, qui est un commissaire indépendant, le directeur d'une galerie nomade, la Pop Galerie, et un grand défricheur de l'art et des cultures populaires en général. Il y a aussi pas mal de paños de ma collection, et David Sandoval, qui a écrit un texte pour le livre, est l'un des détenus avec lequel je communique régulièrement.

Quedarse Ciego
jusqu'au vendredi 24 février, à Going Blind

WWW.LEZINFO.COM
L'actualité des images

PANOS

Du 16 mars au 31 mars 2012.

Cette semaine au monte en l'air, le dernier cri et la pop galerie propose une exposition d'art vernaculaire assez fascinante. L'art des paños.

Il s'agit de mouchoir dessinés par les prisonniers américains, souvent d'origine chicanos. Ces mouchoirs leur permettent de communiquer avec leurs familles, leurs amis. Ce sont avant tout des présents. Certains sont destinés aux enfants, d'autres aux femmes des prisonniers d'autres à leur grand mère ou à leurs amis.

La plupart de ses mouchoirs déclinent des codes propres à la culture des ses détenus qu'on peut aussi retrouver sur les tatouage ou sur peintures murales à l'extérieur, ou encore sur les enveloppes des lettres qu'il envoient. Ces codes son très hétérogènes et sont tous mélangés ce qui donne au final des dessins étonnants. Délires gangsta bling bling mixés avec des figures kitschs telles que des clowns ou des masques de théâtre, qui sont des éléments symboliques très important de cette culture, mais aussi des personnages pour enfants ainsi que des symboles religieux catholiques ou des références aux civilisations pré-hispanique sans oublier l'esthétique des tatouages. Ce que j'aime dans ces images c'est leurs cotés excessifs, passionnés, romantiques, mélodramatiques qui renvoie comme on l'imagine au vies tragiques de ses prisonniers. Rêve et désespoir se mélangent dans un délire esthétique totalement kitsch et décomplexé. Il y a là dans cet art un certaine candeur qui est troublante et touchante.

Vernissage Vendredi 16 à 18H

Le Monte-En-l'Air
71 rue de Ménilmontant - Paris 20
M° Ménilmontant

Yassine

DonutChocula

Paños - Chicano Prison Art
-Reno Leplat-Torti´Collection.

January 4 - February 2, 2013
Opening Reception: Saturday, January 4th, 4-9pm

Whether intensely spiritual or brazenly secular, paño art draws on the deepest emotions of prisoners whose artistic expression is limited only by the materials at hand. The word paño (Spanish for cloth or handkerchief) has come to mean the art form itself -- a ball point pen or colored pencil drawing on a handkerchief.

Scholars have yet to determine the origin of paño art, but some believe that it emerged in the 1940s among Chicano prisoners in the southwestern United States who drew on the handkerchiefs or torn bed sheets. Today paño art is associated with Chicano inmates around the country, both male and female, who neatly fold paños into envelopes and mail them to loved ones.

Paño artists take much of their imagery and inspiration from the larger visual arts vocabulary of Chicano art conspicuous in murals, posters, low rider cars, graffiti, and tattoos. The art form evolves as prisoners talk paño techniques, share their information on materials and style, and trade patterns drawn or traced from magazines, newspapers and catalogs.

The Crazy Life / La Vida Loca: Many paños depict «La Vida Loca,» or « The Crazy Life,» showing scenes of gang life, drug use and violence, as well as the harsh realities of life on the streets, poverty and prison. Symbolized by the masks of comedy and tragedy, the theme «Laugh Now, Cry Later» depicts the consequences of «La Vida Loca.» Imagery reflecting prison life such as clocks, prison bars, hourglasses and watchtowers appears throughout these paños. Prisoners sometimes turn to religion as an alternative to «La Vida Loca,» and some Paños contrast the two lifestyles side by side.

Faith / La Fe: Paños often reflect the predominately Catholic faith of the artists. Traditional religious subjects include Our Lady of Guadalupe (the patron saint of Mexico) and Christ of the Crucifixion, affectionately known as «El Chuy.» Crosses, rosaries, praying hands and pictures of saints are other common religious images. These paños express respect for, or belief in, the protective and redemptive power of these spiritual figures and of religion in general.

Memory / La Memoria: Isolated from their families and communities for long periods of time, inmates craft paños as gifts to mail from prison. Sentimental images or portraits of those close to the artists help maintain bonds of family, love or friendship. Paño artists also recall their life in the barrio (neighborhood), showing landmarks or people they knew well on the outside. Paños can function much the way valentines do, using words, symbols and pictures to communicate love. Paños made for wives or girlfriends often express romantic love. Paños for children might include cartoon characters and popular culture figures. Mothers, aunts and grandmothers often received paños with images of Catholic saints, the Virgin of Guadalupe and Christ.

On the Outside: Until recently, paño art has had a low profile outside of prison. Outside, paños lost the value they once had within the prison system, becoming souvenirs of prison life meaningful only to the ex-inmate and his or her associates, not to society at large.

MOHS exhibit
Sdr. Boulevard 98
DK-1720 Copenhagen V
Denmark

PAÑOS DEUX EXPOSITIONS PERCUTANTES par I.D.

« Paños, art carcéral chicano, collection de Reno Leplat-Torti, en regard des productions des détenus du Centre pénitentiaire de Béziers », exposition réalisée dans le cadre du programme « Culture - Justice ».
Du 6 avril au 7 mai 2013, Musée régional d'art contemporain Languedoc-Roussillon, Sérignan.
mrac.languedocroussillon.fr
« Hollywoodoo et Paños », commissaires Pascal Saumade et Reno Leplat-Torti. Paños issus des collections de Reno Leplat-Torti et de Pascal Saumade, grand défricheur de l'art et des cultures populaires en général.
Exposition avec la complicité de Pakito Bolino, en off de Marseille Capitale de la Culture 2013, du 13 mai au 13 juin 2013. Vernissage le lundi 13 mai 2013 à 18h. Dernier Cri, Marseille.
mauvaisoeil2013.free.fr - www.nationculblanc.com - www.lederniercri.org

Reno Leplat-Torti, né en 1984 à Marseille, est artiste sérigraphe, graphiste, auteur de comics, réalisateur de documentaires, collectionneur. Il y a cinq ans, en glanant sur internet des petits objets fabriqués en prison, il découvre l'art des paños, tradition carcérale de dessins sur mouchoirs destinés aux proches des prisonniers. Frappé par la puissance à la fois du sujet et de la forme, il prend contact avec des familles de détenus américains et possède aujourd'hui une importante collection présentée dans de nombreuses galeries en Europe. Il prépare actuellement un film documentaire sur le sujet. En attendant, deux occasions de découvrir cet art populaire marginal à travers deux expositions au MRAC à Sérignan et au Dernier Cri à Marseille.
En février 2013, dans le cadre du programme « Culture-Justice », Reno Leplat-Torti a proposé aux détenus du centre pénitentiaire de Béziers un atelier de création de paños. En adaptant et traduisant les codes conçus par les détenus américains, les détenus réalisent leurs propres mouchoirs. Le Musée régional d'art contemporain à Sérignan présente l'exposition de ces mouchoirs en écho de la collection de Reno Leplat-Torti qui réunit plus de deux cents paños.
L'art du paño, diminutif de pañuelo ("mouchoir" en espagnol), art populaire marginal, est apparu pendant les années quarante dans les prisons du Texas, de Californie et du Nouveau-Mexique. Certains amateurs estiment que leur origine remonte au système pénitentiaire français mis en place au Mexique après la révolution de 1910. Les détenus, d'origine généralement hispaniques, illettrés pour la plupart, inventent leur propre système de communication avec l'extérieur. Sur de simples mouchoirs réglementaires attribués par l'administration pénitentiaire, ils dessinent à la plume avec de l'encre récupérée, de la cire ou du café. Par la suite, dans les états du sud-ouest des États-Unis cette pratique devient une sorte d'art traditionnel carcéral et se répand dans le reste du pays.
Les inspirations de la culture chicano est très présente : les évocations catholiques ou de la « vida loca » sont associées aux symboles de la prison et de l'amour dans tous ses états. Ces différentes iconographies se retrouvent également dans les tatouages et les peintures murales.
Malgré la précarité des moyens de réalisation, tels des objets transitionnels, ils créent du lien au-delà des barreaux, une façon de s'adresser à la famille ou aux membres du gang... Ces paños apparaissent telles des pages arrachées de journaux intimes cathartiques avouant sentiments, émotions, pensées et rêves dissimulés, témoins de leur vie en captivité à travers une grande force esthétique. Une richesse d'expression visuelle se dégage de ces mouchoirs, une manière de transcender l'enfermement et l'isolement, le passage interminable du temps et l'ennui, la solitude de la sur-vie en prison où l'identité est matée. Des dessins sur toiles miniatures, plus forts que les mots pour recouvrer humanité et dignité. ■

THE PRISON ARTS COALITION

Paños created in US prisons spark the passion of exhibitor in France
13 Jun

PAC asked Reno Angelo Leplat-Torti, an artist and curator of exhibitions of Chicano prison art in France, to tell us a bit about himself, how his interest in prison art developed, and what kind of impact his exhibitions are having.

My name is Reno Angelo Leplat-Torti. I was born in France, but my family emigrated from Italy in the 40's. I studied art, and then I became an assistant in two different art schools' silkscreen workshops. I created my own publishing house 10 years ago, and I'm also organizing a big alternative comic festival in France. I'm trying to keep my own "artistic practice" in the midst of all that.

I've been interested in "folk art" and in what French speakers call Art Brut ("outsider art") since my early artistic beginning. As a teenager I was a bookshop rat, and I started to read underground comics like Le Dernier Cri publications. There, I discovered the raw drawings of Stu Mead, Mattt Konture, Moolinex, GaryPanter, Henry Darger and Raymond Reynaud…I began to draw my own comics, found my passion, and began to pursue my own path as an artist by entering art school.

I have always been interested in autodidact art, and discovered prison art while I was looking for prison-made objects like tattoo machines, knives, etc. My first find was a Mickey Mouse hankie, or paño, which I framed. Over time my collection of paños began to grow, and one day a friend with an art space asked if I'd like to exhibit them.

When I'm setting up my exhibition, I really see the wall as an expression of emotions. I feel paños art is something more intimate than a classic prison drawing, more personal. They are windows into a pinto's heart, and viewing them can feel intimate, almost indecent, like reading a letter belonging to someone else, but the letter is so well written you can't stop until the end – like the shame you can feel in reading the correspondence between Simone de Beauvoir and Nelson Algren.

Paños art is so interesting to me because of the different dimensions it represents. First, this form has connections to Chicano art, tattoo art, and religious art. But also this art form is a prime example of "making the most of what you have" – the artists are cutting up their pillows and bedsheets, and drawing with whatever they can find inside. It's not always a technical challenge – the pintos (Chicano slang for "convict") are not always excellent drawers – but they have time and they put their heart, their soul and their guts in it. And finally the content, the prison hankies are often the only way pintos have to make a gift and express their feelings.

To develop contact with the artists whose work I collect and exhibit takes a very long time, because we need to trust each other, and this is certainly more complicated for them than for me. Because I'm living in Europe it sometimes takes three weeks to receive a letter, so to exchange is not easy. Most of the time I'm in contact with family who send my mail. One guy sold me his hankies during his first week of freedom, first to ward off bad luck, but also because he was needing the money. Now he's able to follow his own exhibition on Facebook, and he's helping me a lot. With the families and the inmates I'm now developing very specials links. I'm trying to help them as much as I can, and I think creating these exhibitions is like helping them to travel – they're locked up, but a piece of their hearts takes a plane and visits Europe. I try to send them photos as often as I can.

People who visit the exhibitions react very strongly, and most of the time in a positive way. When people in Europe discover my collection they usually haven't seen paños before, but they have a lot of references. The American prison system is maybe better known here than the French one, especially through the cinema. We don't have gangs but people are really curious about them. I have found that when people see the paños, they recognize some of the codes and symbols they see in American movies, hip hop music, and tattoo art.

It's great to be able to share these life testimonies with the public. I once did a workshop in a jail in France. I brought a few paños to the prisoners. My idea was to expose them to that practice and then have them draw their own handkerchiefs using their own codes. I didn't want them to use the Chicano aesthetic. That was my first time in jail, and at the beginning I really didn't know if they would like my ideas. But when I showed them the hankies they were totally amazed by them, and by the thought that Latino gang members, who they perceived as "tough guys," can take a pen and draw to express their feelings.

They identified strongly with the American prisoners. They started to draw for the first time and were really proud of what they created. The French hankies are exhibited with my collection until the 7th of May in the MRAC, a museum in southern France.

I'm currently making plans for a documentary about pinto art. My experience in a French jail totally change the preconceptions I had about the inmates, the guards and the "inside life," so I'm hoping the film will help people to meditate on the prison system. I don't know what the outcomes will be, but if a viewer is seduced by something produced by a prisoner serving a life sentence it is a positive step, right?

LIVRES

Reno Leplat-Torti

Panos Chicanos

Musée régional art contemporain Languedoc-Roussillon

Cet ouvrage accompagne l'exposition «Paños, art carcéral chicano» organisée par Reno Leplat-Torti, autour de l'art du *paño*, diminutif de *pañuelo* («mouchoir» en espagnol), art populaire marginal, apparu pendant les années quarante dans les prisons du Texas, de Californie et du Nouveau-Mexique.

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Présentation

Reno Leplat-Torti, Isabelle Durand, Martha Henry, Mariah Sacoman

Panos Chicanos

Le Musée régional d'art contemporain Languedoc-Roussillon à Sérignan, dans le cadre de ses missions de démocratisation de la culture propose des activités adaptées à tous les publics dont des actions avec le centre pénitentiaire de Béziers dans le cadre du programme «Culture-Justice».

En février 2013, l'artiste Reno Leplat-Torti a proposé aux détenus un atelier de création de paños, tradition carcérale étatsunienne de dessins sur mouchoirs destinés aux proches des prisonniers. En adaptant et traduisant les codes conçus par les détenus américains, les détenus du centre pénitentiaire de Béziers ont réalisé leurs propres mouchoirs.

Cet ouvrage présente différents panos issus de la collection de Reno Leplat-Torti qui en compte plus de deux cents. Reno Leplat-Torti est artiste sérigraphe, graphiste, auteur de comics, réalisateur de documentaires, collectionneur. Il y a cinq ans, en glanant sur internet des petits objets fabriqués en prison, il découvre l'art des paños. Il prend contact avec des familles de détenus américains et possède aujourd'hui une importante collection présentée dans de nombreuses galeries en Europe et prépare actuellement un film documentaire sur le sujet.

L'art du paño, diminutif de pañuelo («mouchoir» en espagnol), art populaire marginal, est apparu pendant les années quarante dans les prisons du Texas, de Californie et du Nouveau-Mexique. Certains amateurs estiment que leur origine remonte au système pénitentiaire français mis en place au Mexique après la révolution de 1910. Les détenus, d'origine généralement hispaniques, illettrés pour la plupart, inventent leur propre système de communication avec l'extérieur. Sur de simples mouchoirs réglementaires attribués par l'administration pénitentiaire, ils dessinent à la plume avec de l'encre récupérée, de la cire ou du café. Par la suite, dans les états du sud-ouest des États-Unis cette pratique devient une sorte d'art traditionnel carcéral et se répand dans le reste du pays.

La culture chicana est très présente: les évocations catholiques ou de la «vida loca» sont associées aux symboles de la prison et de l'amour dans tous ses états. Ces différentes iconographies se retrouvent également dans les tatouages chicanos et les peintures murales. Les paños envoyés aux enfants convoquent le répertoire d'images apprécié des petits: des Mickeys, des peluches, des oursons.

Malgré la précarité des moyens de réalisation, tels des objets transitionnels, ils rassurent et créent du lien au-delà des barreaux, u façon de s'adresser à la famille, ou aux membres du gang... Ces pa apparaissent telles des pages arrachées de journaux intimes cathartiques avouant sentiments, émotions, pensées et rêves dissimulés, témoins de leur vie en captivité à travers une grande for esthétique. Une richesse d'expression visuelle se dégage de ces mouchoirs, une manière de transcender l'enfermement et l'isolemer passage interminable du temps et l'ennui, la solitude de la sur-vie e prison où l'identité est matée. Des dessins sur toiles miniatures, plu forts que les mots pour recouvrer humanité et dignité.

Sommaire

Ouvrage édité à l'occasion de l'exposition «Paños, art carcéral chica au printemps 2013 réalisée dans le cadre du programme «Culture-Justice» au Musée régional d'art contemporain Languedoc-Roussill Sérignan en regard des productions des détenus du Centre péniten de Béziers.

How Prison Art From Texas Captured the Art World's Attention

PAÑOS, SMALL CLOTHS SWATCHES DECORATED WITH DETAILED ILLUSTRATIONS BY INMATES, NOW HANG IN NEW YORK MUSEUMS AND ARE SNAPPED UP BY WORLDLY COLLECTORS.

by MICHAEL HOINSKI THU FEBRUARY 13, 2014 8:45 AM

Two examples of paños provided by Ed Jordan, a folk art collector from Austin.
NICKI LONGORIA

In 2006, two men dressed in black suits walked into Centro Cultural Aztlán, a modest art gallery located in the design district near the historic Old Spanish Trail in San Antonio. The men passed walked to the offices tucked away in the back of the deco building, where they confronted Centro's executive director, Malena Gonzalez-Cid.

"Are you selling art on behalf of prisoners?" one of them asked her. She looked at them, startled and confused. The men pressed Gonzalez-Cid, informing her that they were from the State of Texas Attorney General's office. They told her that prisoners are *their* property, and inmates can't make money outside of *their* system. Did she know that acting as their dealer was against the law?

It eventually clicked for Gonzalez-Cid. They were talking about the paños, the handkerchiefs that prisoners decorate with black ballpoint pens or colored pencils—or, in a pinch, with coffee beans, ash, and even egg yolk (it makes a nice yellow).

But to her, paños were a form of artistic expression—and that's her trade. In Gonzalez-Cid's 26 years working at Centro, she has helped turn the small non-profit into a bastion for the Hispanic arts community. In 1978, one year after it was founded, Centro organized San Antonio's first annual Díade los Muertos event, which has since grown into a major celebration of the tradition that includes setting up altars and *ofrendas* all over the city. The non-profit sponsors the city's popular annual Lowrider Festival, and it routinely hosts programming that promotes Hispanic culture and art, including exhibits, a mole throwdown, and the Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza. Gonzalez-Cid had been selling paños for about five years, not realizing she was breaking the law. (Never mind that Centro is housed in the same building as a division of the San Antonio police department.) She finally conceded to her inadvertent black-market folk-art enterprise, and the men in the black suits let her off easy, asking that she stop selling the hankies.

"It was like a scene out of a movie," Gonzalez-Cid said incredulously, able to laugh it off in hindsight. "They were serious."

Paño artist: Esteban Ochoa. Photograph by Josh Huskin.

The first known paños date back to the thirties, when Hispanic prisoners in Texas and throughout the Southwest began tearing up small strips of bed sheets and pillowcases to draw on them. (Prison officials ultimately caught on and began offering cheap handkerchiefs in order to preserve their linens.) The paño, which translates to "cloth," started as a way for prisoners to communicate with each other and with the outside world. The messages can be tender, like the birthday paño with flowers, birthdate, and name on it that Gonzalez-Cid received from her husband a couple of years ago, when he was in a federal immigration detention center. Or it can be nefarious—the *pendejo* three cells down who receives a paño with a two-headed snake on it (the symbol for a snitch) might have just been issued his death sentence. Paños can also represent gang affiliation and religious iconography is very popular subject matter.

In the decades since they first cropped up, paños have become less utilitarian and more a vehicle for highly elaborate and deeply personal art, making them fit for exhibitions throughout the world. Some paño-makers cut the cloth into shapes—ovals, stars, a cross—and fray the edge, which they then meticulously braid back together using other materials, like elastic from socks, to make a pattern resembling a doily.

This incredible and painstaking attention to detail—and outpouring of emotion— captured the attention of Rudy Padilla, a youth development professional from New Mexico. Padilla first saw paños at neighbors' houses in Barelas, in the Albuquerque inner-city. He began collecting the small cloths around 1991, immersed himself in the subculture, and became an authority on the subject. In the mid-nineties, the National Museum of American History solicited Padilla's insight on paños and in the process acquired some pieces from his collection. Padilla also introduced paños to a TV audience, when he turned Evangeline Griego, a Los Angeles filmmaker from New Mexico, on to the art form. In 1996, Griego's fascination led her to make "Paño Arte: Images from Inside," a 31-minute documentary that was broadcast on PBS. For her film, she visited the infamous New Mexico State Penitentiary, the site of a heinous riot in 1980, and interviewed prisoners, and also their families, and put a face on paños.

"The paño is a reminder that 'I'm relevant; I'm still here; I've got these human feelings even though I'm locked up,'" Griego said.

In the process, Griego learned several nuances about this insular underworld. For one, paños aren't typically framed and hanged by the families who receive them, like in a gallery. Instead, they are treated as keepsakes, usually folded and archived, perhaps in a box, or bound together by the year. Paños often aren't signed by their creators, which is perhaps attributed to the fact that paños are created by a relatively small community of artistic prisoners who many times are commissioned by fellow prisoners to make pieces in exchange for things like cigarettes, shampoo, and even immunity from other prisoners. Sometimes the artist makes a template, a *copia*, for others to trace and maybe embellish with their own touch.

"You see some of these paños—I mean, Escher couldn't have done better," Griego said.

Griego's documentary helped launch a paño fascination among art collectors. Reno Leplat-Torti, a young French Renaissance man who dabbles in art, music, and film, became an avid collector, amassing more than two hundred paños, mostly from California. (His collection can be seen at nationculblanc.com, including this paño from 1934 featuring a poem titled "Prison Love," signed by an inmate calling himself "Cannon-Ball.")

A few of Leplat-Torti's paños will be in the "Tattooists, Tattooed" exhibition opening in May at Quai Branly, a folk-art museum in Paris. This follows last year's fifty-fifth Venice Biennale, which displayed paños belonging to Martha Henry and David Joralemon, two New York-based art collectors.

Ed Jordan. a folk-art
collector from Austin, became aware of paños in the late eighties while working as an art instructor at Blinn College's Bastrop campus, which happened to be located in the federal prison there. (Yes, you read that correctly—for about a decade, Blinn College, whose main campus is in Brenham, offered satellite classes to inmates at the Federal Correctional Institution, in Bastrop.) When the program ended in the mid-nineties, Jordan said he was told to "trash, burn, or take home any leftover art, supplies, and so on." He brought everything home and donated most of the supplies to local charities. He stayed in touch with former students, who helped him acquire 63 paños. From August to October of last year, the Austin nonprofit Texas Folklife displayed some of them in the exhibition, "Paño Art: Handkerchief Drawings from Texas Prisons."

It would appear the hip art scene has become enamored of the savage soft side. Considering the popularity of tattoos, and how intertwined paño art is with tattoos, it makes sense. Plus, the curious ways of acquiring paños is half the fun for the collector.

Paño art: Luis A. Martinez. Photograph by Josh Huskin.

Centro Cultural Aztlán inherited the paños-for-sale program from Kathy Vargas, the visual arts director for the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, a San Antonio nonprofit founded in 1980 to promote contemporary Hispanic culture and arts. Vargas had sold the paños in the gift shop since the early nineties. She got them from Alex Rubio, the current artist in residence at the Blue Star Contemporary Art Museum and a former instructor in the Bexar County jail arts program.

Vargas filtered the proceeds back into the prisoners' commissary accounts, creating not only an income stream for them but also a way for prisoners to get recognized for their art. When Vargas left the Guadalupe Center around 2000 to become a photography professor at the University of the Incarnate Word, she was part of an exodus of staff. This exodus was unsettling to her and prompted her to gift the paños to Centro.

"The sales went on for years and nobody said anything," Gonzalez-Cid said.

But then the political climate changed. According to a report this past November on an NPR's *Latino U.S.A.* , paños are now illegal in Texas jails. Hard-nosed policies regarding prisoner freedoms proliferated under Governor George W. Bush and Governor Rick Perry, virtually eradicating the enrichment programs funded by Governor Ann Richards during the early nineties, which had helped spawn a golden age of paño-making in Texas.

"After Governor Richards's term, art rehab classes in prison were closed and making paños wasn't allowed," Henry, the New York art collector who was cited in the NPR report, told me in an email.

Jail arts programs were largely responsible for making paños culturally significant. And Bexar County was at the forefront of this movement.

"Bexar County had an amazing jail arts program," said Glenna Parks, a former instructor during the time the photographer Richard Avedon visited the jail and took shots for his book *In the American West* . "There was nothing like what Bexar County had going for it."

In 1979 Bexar County hired Parks to teach English and poetry, and during her tenure at the jail, she also taught studio arts. It was in these classes that the inmates taught her about paños. After seeing what these prisoners were creating, she decided to help focus their energies on honing their work. First, she wanted to get her students to make their art on fabric that was not their bed sheets, whether it be purchased handkerchiefs or free fabrics offered in her class. And then, as the quality of work improved, she aimed to get their art acknowledged. As luck would have it, one of Parks's former professors at the University of California, San Diego, knew about an exhibition, "The Prison Show: Realities and Representations," being presented by the Whitney Museum of American Art, in New York, and put Parks in touch with one of the curators. When the show opened in 1981, some of the paños by Bexar County inmates were included. The positive reception to her students' work later landed Parks an opportunity to write a chapter on paños for the book *Folk Art in Texas* , published in 1985 by the Texas Folklore Society to celebrate the Texas sesquicentennial.

Paño art: Marcelino Martinez. Photograph by Josh Huskin.

If paños are illegal in Texas jails, some of the prisoners didn't get the memo. Platon Cruz Torres, 31, has made well over one hundred paños. The Dallas advocacy group Hope for Peace and Justice has even exhibited some of his pieces, thanks to a pen pal relationship that one of their board of directors, DeSorrow Golden, formed with him.

Torres is a prisoner in the McConnell Unit, one of two units in Beeville, about halfway between San Antonio and Corpus Christi. McConnell is notorious for its gang activity and for having some of the most hardened criminals in the Texas prison system. Torres was incarcerated in 2005 for aggravated robbery and is slated for release in 2035, according to his prisoninmates.com site.

Through a series of letters written to *Texas Monthly* in November, Torres revealed his background, his life in prison, and the mechanics of his trade. His only request in return was to give a "shout-out" to his daughter, Lucia Torres. "I love you, baby girl," he said. "You stay strong till Daddy comes home!"

Torres was raised in Southeast Houston by parents who were illegal immigrants from Michoacán, Mexico. He said his parents had a lot of problems, and as a result, he and his brothers had the freedom to do whatever they wanted.

"Street gangs, drugs, all that came next," Torres said. "My thing was 'taggin.' I loved the art."

When Torres was first locked up, he bought a *copia*. He got comfortable with the repetition of tracing and familiarized himself with his materials. Then he branched out and began creating his own patterns.

"You don't
have to be an artist to do paños," he said. "But if you're someone that has never drawn, yeah, probably your first fifty paños are gonna be boo-boo! It's not that easy to just sit and draw on loose cotton."

Torres first "irons" his paños. This used to involve soaking the paño in milk (or hair gel) and then spreading it on the wall of his cell to smooth over using his ID card. Now he uses wax to harden the paño, like a canvas, which makes it easier to work on.

Torres was readying a paño for a Christmas present at the time of his correspondence. He said there's no money in making paños, but he's been compensated with essentials like stamps, shoes, soup, and cookies.

"If you don't have food, well, basically you're stuck with the slop they give you around here," he said. "Maybe that's why I've gotten good, tired of eating slop! LOL j/k."

Despite his jovial nature, Torres made it clear that paños exist as an enduring symbol of sorrow and loneliness.

"Till this day, paños are known for the struggles our 'raza' faced back in the dayz," Torres said. "In one paño, one man's life!"

Paño art: Ricardo Bautista. Photograph by Josh Huskin.

Malena Gonzalez-Cid stood in the office of her colleague, Ruth Marlisa Guajardo, one morning last September. She was showing off a bin of about 35 paños now relegated to Centro Cultural Aztlán's archives. The paños lay in plastic sleeves, backed by cardboard. On some were stickers with prisoners' names, from jails like Bexar County and Huntsville. Leftover price tags ranged from $40 to $50. There were mural scenes from the artists' old *barrios* and portraits of revered figures like Jesus Christ, the Virgin of Guadalupe, and Tejano superstar Selena. In some, Aztec warriors conveyed mighty ancestry. In others, voluptuous women with long black hair represented desire.

One particular paño called a *viaje*, or journey, told the personal story of one man's fall from grace. In the background, the sun looked down over a prison tower. Two beautiful women (or maybe they are the same woman) hovered in the sky, watching over the man. In the first of three depictions of the man, he is portrayed as a free man, wearing a knit cap and holding a crescent moon. In the second, he's caught in a vortex of bad energy, his cap replaced by a bandana. In the third depiction, he's in jail, the upper half of his face obscured by prison bars.

In the middle of the paño, a clock strikes a quarter past twelve—perhaps the time of the man's crime. Around it were what looked like tissues, or miniature paños, spiraling out towards the viewer, each with a number on them chronicling the calendar years that the man had spent in jail: '94, '95, '96, '97, '98, '99.

"It's their trajectory—" Gonzalez-Cid said before correcting herself, "or tragic-tory of their life."

Tags: THE CULTURE, ART, PRISON, BEXAR COUNTY JAIL, PAÑOS, PRISON ART

XX I **Paño, prison handkerchief.** D. Campos. California, United States. 2011. 40 x 40 cm. Cotton, pen, ink. Private collection, Reno Leplat-Torti.

EXCERPT FROM *ART FROM THE INSIDE: PAÑO DRAWINGS BY CHICANO PRISONERS*

Martha V. Henry

Origins and sources

Although the origin of paño drawings is unknown, the art form probably emerged from jails and prisons in Texas, New Mexico and California during the *pachuco*—zootsuiter—movement of the 1940's, when Chicano identity first crystallized. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s convicts risked punishment to tear up their pillowcases and sheets and make drawings on them with fountain pens that portrayed their experiences and expressed their feelings about doing jail time. Fountain pens were difficult to use because their points ripped the fabric, and consequently few of these early works have survived. By the 1970's prison commissaries stocked ballpoint pens and large white handkerchiefs with woven borders. Unfortunately the ballpoint pens penetrated the loose weave of these handkerchiefs and made the cotton canvases difficult to handle. In the late 1980's prison authorities allowed commissaries to sell smaller, more tightly woven handkerchiefs that were far easier to draw on.[1] In the hands of the paño makers, these handkerchiefs became miniature canvases.

Paño makers in jail live in a world of limited visual inspiration. Some are inspired by the tattooed designs on their own bodies and those of other inmates. Most appropriate images from printed sources: lowrider, tattoo, soap opera and sex magazines; newspapers; calendars, posters and popular illustrations of religious figures, Mexican heroes and martyrs; comic and coloring books; and movie and burlesque posters. Each artist selects and preserves favorite illustrations in a file of personal images called *copias* that he will modify over time as his tastes change.[2]

Copias are sometimes owned by specific prisoners. They are valued as commercial property because their owners can barter the right to use their *copias* with other inmate-artists or lend them with no strings attached. When a paño maker is released from prison, he either gives his *copias* to another inmate-artist for safekeeping, or he lets them be used by anyone who wants them.[3]

Paño making

The easiest paño to make is a colored piece. The artist selects an image from his *copias* and traces it onto a sheet of paper. After deciding which colors to use, he fills in the study's outlines by shading it with ballpoint pens, colored pencils or felt tip markers. The technique is similar to tattooing. Next he adjusts the scale with the aid of a hand-drawn grid. Once the drawing has been transferred onto the handkerchief, he repeats the process of filling in the outlines with color and shading.[4]

To create a complex black and white paño an artist must exercise a much higher level of skill and visual organization.[5] Again using a technique similar to tattooing, an artist composes a montage by transferring multiple *copias* onto the handkerchief. He juxtaposes images in varying sizes, all relating aesthetically and symbolically to a central image.[6] The artist usually leaves the background ink-free to reveal the white color of the handkerchief. However, he sometimes uses *sobra*, a technique of stippling, shading or inking for dramatic effect that many inmate-artists admire but few master.[7]

Although most Chicano prison drawings are made on handkerchiefs, inmate-artists draw on almost anything that they can find, including nylon commissary bags used for storage and laundry and envelopes purchased in the prison store. Despite the different formats, the style of drawing is the same as on the

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handkerchiefs. However, the purpose of decorating a bag is to identify its owner and to prevent thieves from stealing it. Hand-decorated envelopes in color or black and white are used to mail letters and paños.
San Antonio's paño artists draw on a rich visual vocabulary of Mexican and American culture—high and low. Their work blends barrio art, like tattoo flashes, lowrider detailing, murals and graffiti; representations of Christian religious figures and Mexican heroes; and symbolic references to the prison experience of *tirando tiempo*—doing time. Paño makers generally use black ink for drawings that portray *la vida loca*—the crazy life of drugs and alcohol, gambling, prostitution and other crimes—and *viajes*—dreams, fantasies, nightmares, and drug trips. Colored pencils are usually reserved for religious, family and romantic subjects. When reading some paños, the story unfolds from right to left. Paños also relate to the popular religious paintings on tin called *ex votos* that record miraculous events in the patron's life. Although paños sometimes include English or Spanish phrases, visual images usually convey their meaning.
Many paños have evocative elements woven into their compositions. Symbols of time and its passing are frequently represented. Clocks, hourglasses, calendar pages, tombstones, and numbered book pages all convey the relentless passing of time and the boredom of prison existence. Chicanos' pride in, and identification with earlier times is evoked by figures of a romanticized Mexican past, including Aztec warriors, Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata, and images of 1940's Texan *pachucos* and their antique lowriders. Images of the Virgin of Guadalupe and Jesus Christ copied from religious books and postcards and associated themes of suffering, redemption, and prayer are important in paño art. Love in all its aspects—familial, romantic, and sexual—are expressed symbolically with cartoons, hearts, ribbons, flowers and birds, or with explicit images derived from sex magazines and pornography. Illustrations of *la vida loca* are juxtaposed with prison symbols that include brick walls, bars, chain link fences, barbed wire, and watchtowers, as well as vignettes of cellblock life. By using a rich inventory of images and combining them in graphically powerful ways, paño artists create windows onto their experiences, thoughts and feelings. The ability to tell both simple and complex stories that have meaning to both those in prison and those on the outside sets paños apart from other forms of prison art.

Mexican Heritage And Chicano Identity

In the aftermath of the Spanish conquest of Mexico, Pre-Hispanic religion blended with Spanish Catholicism and enhanced Mexico's narrative and visual traditions. On the political front, multiple incursions and foreign rule altered the borders between Mexico and the United States. People living on both sides of the border developed particular cultural traditions centered on ranching with its own set of heroes and symbols.[8] Drawing upon their knowledge of history when making paños with Mexican or border themes, inmate-artists are able to share their beliefs and traditions with other inmates. Thus, prison becomes a school for the transmission of Chicano culture.[9] *Copias* include scenes of Aztec nobles and maidens in architectural settings taken from Pre-Hispanic history and legends. An eagle standing on a cactus with a snake in its beak is the ancient symbol of the Aztec capitol of Tenochtitlan, the final resting place at the end of the Aztecs' migration out of Aztlán, their legendary homeland. Today it is Mexico's national symbol. The eagle and the snake, as well as the sun, symbolize Mexico in paño iconography, but along with the letters MM and the number 13, they may also represent the Mexican Mafia.[10] Because of its gang connotations, Texas has outlawed some of this imagery.[11] The Virgin of Guadalupe, patron saint of Mexico, symbolizes protection and Mexican identity, and she often appears in paños as a reassuring presence. When depicting the heroes of the Mexican Revolution, the paño maker's source may be old *corridos*—narrative ballads celebrating the outlaw heroes of the border wars.[12] Liberation figures, like Pancho Villa brandishing a sword or Emiliano Zapata wearing a *bandolera*—pistol belt—across his chest, are usually surrounded by images of the Alamo and beautiful *charras*—ranch women—who wear traditional sombreros with wide brims. While Mexican national symbols generally refer to an idealized past, border motifs are more often associated with reclaiming land, liberty, and dignity for the Mexican people. Chicanos' identification with their roots and culture is a profound source of pride and an affirmation of their heritage. Chicanos are prisoners of their dual Mexican and American nationalities, yet they are alienated from both. Culturally, they are suspended between a motherland that they vaguely remember and a homeland that relegates them to society's margins. At the core of Chicano identity is *La Raza*, their shared ancestral experience of Mexico.[13]
The lowrider is the most unique, flamboyant and enduring expression of Chicano pride and identity. These customized cars originated as an expression of *pachuco* style in the 1940's when Chicanos struggled against discrimination and poverty. In an era when ethnic minorities were expected to conform to Anglo dress code, *pachucos* defied the status quo by wearing zootsuits with baggy high-waisted trousers, oversized coats, wide-brimmed hats, long gold watch chains and droopy moustaches.[14] *Pachucos* customized cast-off cars, called *bombas*, by chopping, lowering and dropping the frames so they hovered inches from the ground. The automobile became a canvas for the expressions of its owner's dreams and fantasies. Cruising the boulevards "low and slow" while listening to their favorite tunes on the radio, *pachucos* in their lowriders embodied Chicano pride and ethnic defiance.

The virgin of guadalupe

In 1531 Juan Diego, a Mexican Indian peasant, had a vision of the Virgin Mary at Tepeyac, a hill outside Mexico City and the original site of the shrine of Tonantzin, the Aztec Mother Goddess. Unlike the Spanish conquerors' icons, Juan Diego's Virgin was dark-skinned and dressed in traditional Indian costume. She told him that she wanted a temple built in her honor. To prove to the bishop that Juan Diego's vision was real, the Virgin told him to gather roses blooming in winter from the rocks and wrap them in his cape. When he

XX I Paño, prison handkerchief : *Tears of a clown*. Tito 210. California, United States. 2011. 40 x 40 cm. Cotton, pen, ink. Private collection, Reno Leplat-Torti.
XX I Paño, prison handkerchief : *Mexican Pride*. David Sandoval. California, United States. 2009. 40 x 40 cm. Cotton, pen, ink. Private collection, Reno Leplat-Torti.

XX I Paño, prison handkerchief. Anonymous. California, United States. 2011. 40 x 40 cm. Cotton, crayons. Private collection, Reno Leplat-Torti.

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La vida loca and the *Camaradas*

La vida loca, the crazy life of the street with its lure of sex, gambling, drugs, alcohol, and crime, is a seductive lifestyle of thrills, pleasure and instant gratification. Unfortunately, many who live it end up imprisoned, beginning a cycle of addiction and incarceration that is a direct consequence. *La vida loca* is the life of an outsider who is not living a normal existence. He lives on the edge of society following other rules. The origins of the outsider in *tejano* culture can be found in the old *corridos* that celebrated the outlaw heroes of the border wars, who were usually tequila smugglers, train robbers and illegal aliens looking for work. The famous lyric, "defending one's right with his pistol in his hand" was an outcry against the injustice these men fought against.[15] Paño artists who record *la vida loca* always include in their work the consequences of the lifestyle with images of what has been lost by those who lead it.[16]

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LATINOS ET CHICANOS

PAR AXELLE CORTY

Il s'appelle Freddy Negrete. Aux États-Unis, dans les années 1970, il devient le premier tatoueur professionnel d'origine chicano. Ce terme, dérivé du mot « mexicano », porte en lui une revendication et une stigmatisation. Qu'ils soient nouveaux arrivants ou nés dans des États issus de la cession de territoires mexicains aux États-Unis, les Mexicains pauvres de Californie ont souvent un rapport douloureux avec le « rêve américain ». Les parents de Freddy Negrete étaient membres d'un gang de Los Angeles. Lui suit le même chemin. Attiré par les tatouages des mauvais garçons, il commence à s'initier aux techniques d'encrage à l'adolescence. Il n'échappe pas à la prison dès ce très jeune âge. Là, son art s'affirme. Il découvre la *fine line*. Ce style de tatouage graphique et ultra-réaliste, aussi appelé *black and grey*, exécuté à une seule aiguille, exclusivement à l'encre noire, est dérivé des *paños*, un type d'art carcéral né dans les prisons de Los Angeles. Les détenus réalisent au stylo, sur les mouchoirs de leur paquetage, des œuvres évoquant la fierté *chicana*, la douleur de l'enfermement, la nostalgie amoureuse ou l'attachement à la famille, aux gangs et à la *vida loca*, cette vie sans règle, attirante et dangereuse, entre armes à feu et substances illicites. Légendaires rebelles mexicains, tels Pancho Villa ou Emiliano Zapata, motifs aztèques, sublimes femmes à sombreros, motifs religieux identitaires (comme la Vierge de Guadalupe, sainte patronne de Mexico), cohabitent dans les compositions avec des lettrages évoquant les gangs. Tatouages comme *paños* se nourrissent de répertoires de dessins réalisés par les prisonniers. Ceux de Negrete se diffusent dans tout le pays, jusqu'au fameux atelier de Charlie Cartwright, à East Los Angeles, qui l'embauche. Latinos et Blancs de la classe moyenne, les clients de Negrete veulent tous des tatouages ressemblant à ceux des prisonniers. Aujourd'hui, la *fine line* a essaimé dans le monde entier, des *maras* (gangs d'Amérique du Sud) aux milieux plus rangés fascinés par la *vida loca*.

Ci-contre, de haut en bas :
PAÑO, MOUCHOIR DE PRISON : *TEARS OF A CLOWN.*
Tito 210. Californie, États-Unis. 2011.
40 x 40 cm. Coton, stylo à bille.
Collection particulière
Reno Leplat-Torti.

PAÑO, MOUCHOIR DE PRISON : *MI VIDA LOCA.*
K. James. Californie, États-Unis. 2011.
50 x 50 cm. Coton, stylo à bille.
Collection particulière
Reno Leplat-Torti.

PAÑO, MOUCHOIR DE PRISON.
D. Campos. Californie, États-Unis. 2011.
40 x 40 cm. Coton, stylo à bille.
Collection particulière
Reno Leplat-Torti.

Ci-dessus et détail page de gauche :
PAÑO, MOUCHOIR DE PRISON.
Anonyme. Californie, États-Unis. 2011.
40 x 40 cm. Coton, crayons de couleur.
Collection particulière
Reno Leplat-Torti.

Ci-dessous
PAÑO, MOUCHOIR DE PRISON : *MEXICAN PRIDE.*
David Sandoval. Californie, États-Unis. 2009.
40 x 40 cm. Coton, crayons de couleur.
Collection particulière
Reno Leplat-Torti.

Page de gauche :
FRAGMENT DE SIFFLET.
Mexique, Yucatan.
Terre cuite, 13 x 7,2 x 6 cm.
Paris, musée du quai Branly.

XX I **Paño, prison handkerchief.** D. Campos. California, United States. 2011. 40 x 40 cm. Cotton, pen, ink. Private collection, Reno Leplat-Torti.

EXCERPT FROM *ART FROM THE INSIDE: PAÑO DRAWINGS BY CHICANO PRISONERS*

Martha V. Henry

Origins and sources

Although the origin of paño drawings is unknown, the art form probably emerged from jails and prisons in Texas, New Mexico and California during the *pachuco*—zootsuiter—movement of the 1940's, when Chicano identity first crystallized. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s convicts risked punishment to tear up their pillowcases and sheets and make drawings on them with fountain pens that portrayed their experiences and expressed their feelings about doing jail time. Fountain pens were difficult to use because their points ripped the fabric, and consequently few of these early works have survived. By the 1970's prison commissaries stocked ballpoint pens and large white handkerchiefs with woven borders. Unfortunately the ballpoint pens penetrated the loose weave of these handkerchiefs and made the cotton canvases difficult to handle. In the late 1980's prison authorities allowed commissaries to sell smaller, more tightly woven handkerchiefs that were far easier to draw on.[1] In the hands of the paño makers, these handkerchiefs became miniature canvases.

Paño makers in jail live in a world of limited visual inspiration. Some are inspired by the tattooed designs on their own bodies and those of other inmates. Most appropriate images from printed sources: lowrider, tattoo, soap opera and sex magazines; newspapers; calendars, posters and popular illustrations of religious figures, Mexican heroes and martyrs; comic and coloring books; and movie and burlesque posters. Each artist selects and preserves favorite illustrations in a file of personal images called *copias* that he will modify over time as his tastes change.[2]

Copias are sometimes owned by specific prisoners. They are valued as commercial property because their owners can barter the right to use their *copias* with other inmate-artists or lend them with no strings attached. When a paño maker is released from prison, he either gives his *copias* to another inmate-artist for safekeeping, or he lets them be used by anyone who wants them.[3]

Paño making

The easiest paño to make is a colored piece. The artist selects an image from his *copias* and traces it onto a sheet of paper. After deciding which colors to use, he fills in the study's outlines by shading it with ballpoint pens, colored pencils or felt tip markers. The technique is similar to tattooing. Next he adjusts the scale with the aid of a hand-drawn grid. Once the drawing has been transferred onto the handkerchief, he repeats the process of filling in the outlines with color and shading.[4]

To create a complex black and white paño an artist must exercise a much higher level of skill and visual organization.[5] Again using a technique similar to tattooing, an artist composes a montage by transferring multiple *copias* onto the handkerchief. He juxtaposes images in varying sizes, all relating aesthetically and symbolically to a central image.[6] The artist usually leaves the background ink-free to reveal the white color of the handkerchief. However, he sometimes uses *sobra*, a technique of stippling, shading or inking for dramatic effect that many inmate-artists admire but few master.[7]

Although most Chicano prison drawings are made on handkerchiefs, inmate-artists draw on almost anything that they can find, including nylon commissary bags used for storage and laundry and envelopes purchased in the prison store. Despite the different formats, the style of drawing is the same as on the

handkerchiefs. However, the purpose of decorating a bag is to identify its owner and to prevent thieves from stealing it. Hand-decorated envelopes in color or black and white are used to mail letters and paños.
San Antonio's paño artists draw on a rich visual vocabulary of Mexican and American culture—high and low. Their work blends barrio art, like tattoo flashes, lowrider detailing, murals and graffiti; representations of Christian religious figures and Mexican heroes; and symbolic references to the prison experience of *tirando tiempo*—doing time. Paño makers generally use black ink for drawings that portray *la vida loca*—the crazy life of drugs and alcohol, gambling, prostitution and other crimes—and *viajes*—dreams, fantasies, nightmares, and drug trips. Colored pencils are usually reserved for religious, family and romantic subjects. When reading some paños, the story unfolds from right to left. Paños also relate to the popular religious paintings on tin called *ex votos* that record miraculous events in the patron's life. Although paños sometimes include English or Spanish phrases, visual images usually convey their meaning.
Many paños have evocative elements woven into their compositions. Symbols of time and its passing are frequently represented. Clocks, hourglasses, calendar pages, tombstones, and numbered book pages all convey the relentless passing of time and the boredom of prison existence. Chicanos' pride in, and identification with earlier times is evoked by figures of a romanticized Mexican past, including Aztec warriors, Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata, and images of 1940's Texan *pachucos* and their antique lowriders. Images of the Virgin of Guadalupe and Jesus Christ copied from religious books and postcards and associated themes of suffering, redemption, and prayer are important in paño art. Love in all its aspects—familial, romantic, and sexual—are expressed symbolically with cartoons, hearts, ribbons, flowers and birds, or with explicit images derived from sex magazines and pornography. Illustrations of *la vida loca* are juxtaposed with prison symbols that include brick walls, bars, chain link fences, barbed wire, and watchtowers, as well as vignettes of cellblock life. By using a rich inventory of images and combining them in graphically powerful ways, paño artists create windows onto their experiences, thoughts and feelings. The ability to tell both simple and complex stories that have meaning to both those in prison and those on the outside sets paños apart from other forms of prison art.

Mexican Heritage And Chicano Identity

In the aftermath of the Spanish conquest of Mexico, Pre-Hispanic religion blended with Spanish Catholicism and enhanced Mexico's narrative and visual traditions. On the political front, multiple incursions and foreign rule altered the borders between Mexico and the United States. People living on both sides of the border developed particular cultural traditions centered on ranching with its own set of heroes and symbols.[8] Drawing upon their knowledge of history when making paños with Mexican or border themes, inmate-artists are able to share their beliefs and traditions with other inmates. Thus, prison becomes a school for the transmission of Chicano culture.[9] *Copias* include scenes of Aztec nobles and maidens in architectural settings taken from Pre-Hispanic history and legends. An eagle standing on a cactus with a snake in its beak is the ancient symbol of the Aztec capitol of Tenochtitlan, the final resting place at the end of the Aztecs' migration out of Aztlán, their legendary homeland. Today it is Mexico's national symbol. The eagle and the snake, as well as the sun, symbolize Mexico in paño iconography, but along with the letters MM and the number 13, they may also represent the Mexican Mafia.[10] Because of its gang connotations, Texas has outlawed some of this imagery.[11] The Virgin of Guadalupe, patron saint of Mexico, symbolizes protection and Mexican identity, and she often appears in paños as a reassuring presence. When depicting the heroes of the Mexican Revolution, the paño maker's source may be old *corridos*—narrative ballads celebrating the outlaw heroes of the border wars.[12] Liberation figures, like Pancho Villa brandishing a sword or Emiliano Zapata wearing a *bandolera*—pistol belt—across his chest, are usually surrounded by images of the Alamo and beautiful *charras*—ranch women—who wear traditional sombreros with wide brims. While Mexican national symbols generally refer to an idealized past, border motifs are more often associated with reclaiming land, liberty, and dignity for the Mexican people. Chicanos' identification with their roots and culture is a profound source of pride and an affirmation of their heritage. Chicanos are prisoners of their dual Mexican and American nationalities, yet they are alienated from both. Culturally, they are suspended between a motherland that they vaguely remember and a homeland that relegates them to society's margins. At the core of Chicano identity is *La Raza*, their shared ancestral experience of Mexico.[13]
The lowrider is the most unique, flamboyant and enduring expression of Chicano pride and identity. These customized cars originated as an expression of *pachuco* style in the 1940's when Chicanos struggled against discrimination and poverty. In an era when ethnic minorities were expected to conform to Anglo dress code, *pachucos* defied the status quo by wearing zootsuits with baggy high-waisted trousers, oversized coats, wide-brimmed hats, long gold watch chains and droopy moustaches.[14] *Pachucos* customized cast-off cars, called *bombas*, by chopping, lowering and dropping the frames so they hovered inches from the ground. The automobile became a canvas for the expressions of its owner's dreams and fantasies. Cruising the boulevards "low and slow" while listening to their favorite tunes on the radio, *pachucos* in their lowriders embodied Chicano pride and ethnic defiance.

The virgin of guadalupe

In 1531 Juan Diego, a Mexican Indian peasant, had a vision of the Virgin Mary at Tepeyac, a hill outside Mexico City and the original site of the shrine of Tonantzin, the Aztec Mother Goddess. Unlike the Spanish conquerors' icons, Juan Diego's Virgin was dark-skinned and dressed in traditional Indian costume. She told him that she wanted a temple built in her honor. To prove to the bishop that Juan Diego's vision was real, the Virgin told him to gather roses blooming in winter from the rocks and wrap them in his cape. When he

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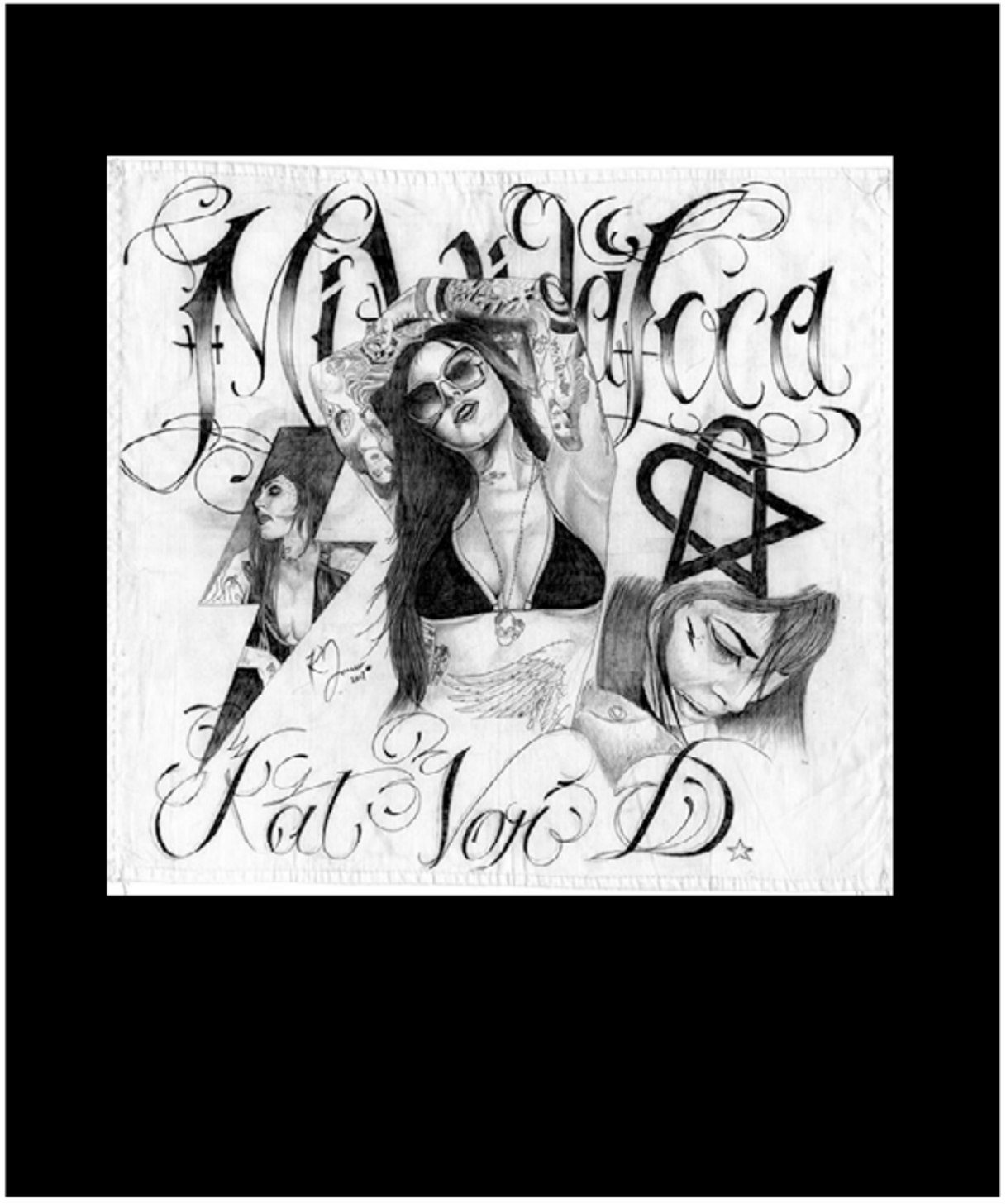

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Boobs, Skulls, and Mickey Mouse: The Art of Hardened Mexican Prisoners

February 6, 2015

Photos by **RENO LEPLAT-TORTI**

All images courtesy of Reno Leplat-Torti / Paños Chicanos

Words by Rik Beune.

The tradition of paño (from the Spanish 'pañuelo' which means 'handkerchief') began in the correctional facilities of Western American States sometime in the 1940s. At the time, decorating handkerchiefs was the only way for illiterate Mexican prisoners to communicate with the outside world. To this day, paños are still often sent to friends and family instead of letters, while, in certain prisons, the handkerchiefs are a popular form of currency.

Most of the artworks are tattoo-like images of skulls, clowns, lowriders, and pin-up girls drawn on muslin cloth with a ballpoint pen. Themes range from religious to pornographic, with decorative elements like boobs, teddy bears, skulls, and unicorns alternating repeatedly as if they were conceived in pairs. Paños basically show that even the most hardened criminals make their mother a hand-drawn card on Mother's day.

Up until recently, paños rarely made it past the walls of prison cells or of the prisoners' relatives' homes. Five years ago, while researching prison artifacts artist and collector Reno Leplat-Torti discovered the art of paños and set out to collect as many of them as possible. At the moment, his collection counts more than 200, which he has been exhibiting in galleries all around Europe.

*Find out more about Leplat-Torti's collection **here**.*

German

Die Tradition der sogenannten „Paños" (das Wort stammt vom spanischen Wort ‚pañuelo' ab, was auf Deutsch ‚Taschentuch' bedeutet) entstand während der 40er Jahre in den Strafvollzugsanstalten der westlichen US-Bundesstaaten. Damals war das Bemalen von Taschentüchern die einzige Möglichkeit für analphabetische mexikanische Insassen, mit der Außenwelt zu kommunizieren. Selbst heute werden oftmals noch Paños anstelle von Briefen an Freunde und Familie geschickt. In einigen Gefängnissen sind die Taschentücher auch ein beliebtes Zahlungsmittel.

Meistens werden tattoo-ähnliche Abbildungen von Totenköpfen, Clowns, Lowridern und Pin-Up-Girls mit einem Kugelschreiber auf Musselin-Stoff gemalt. Thematisch gesehen reicht die Palette dabei von Religion bis hin zu Pornografie, während Dinge wie Brüste, Teddybären, Totenschädel oder Einhörner immer wieder als dekorative Elemente dienen—man könnte fast meinen, dass sie ein Muss sind. Im Grunde sind Paños der Beweis dafür, dass auch die härtesten Kriminellen ihren Müttern zu Muttertag eine selbstgemalte Karte schicken.

Bis vor Kurzem waren Paños außerhalb der Gefängnismauern und der Wohnhäuser der Gefangenenverwandtschaft kaum bekannt. Vor fünf Jahren ist der Künstler und Sammler Reno Leplat-Torti jedoch bei seinen Recherchen zu Gefängnisartefakten auf die Taschentuchkunst gestoßen und hat es sich zur Aufgabe gemacht, so viele Paños wie möglich zu sammeln. Inzwischen hat er schon mehr als 200 von ihnen angehäuft und in verschiedenen Kunstgalerien Europas ausgestellt.

Mehr Information zu Leplat-Tortis Sammlung findest du hier.

Dutch

De traditie van de paño (pañuelo is Spaans voor zakdoek) stamt uit de jaren veertig, toen veel Mexicaanse gevangenen niet konden lezen en schrijven. Het versieren van zakdoeken was voor de Chicano-gevangen in Texas, Californië en New Mexico de enige manier om te communiceren met de buitenwereld. Nog steeds worden dit soort zakdoekjes vaak naar vrienden en familie gestuurd, in plaats van brieven. In sommige gevangenissen zijn de zakdoeken nog steeds een populaire ruilmiddel.

De meeste doeken bevatten tatoeage-achtige afbeeldingen van schedels, clowns, lowriders en pin-ups. De thema's van de paños variëren van religieus tot pornografisch, en je vindt tussen de doodshoofden en tieten ook teddyberen en verliefde eenhoorns. De paños laten zien dat zelfs de meest geharde criminelen hun moeder een tekening toesturen voor moederdag.

Vrijdagavond opent er in de galerie Libertine in Amsterdam een expositie van deze gevangeniskunst onder de titel 'Paños Chicanos'. Tot nu toe bleven de paños vaak bij familieleden of binnen de muren van de gevangenis bewaard. Kunstverzamelaar Reno Leplat-Torti raakte enorm geïnteresseerd in de zakdoeken en bouwde een band op met familieleden van gevangenen. In de expositie is de verzameling van Leplat-Torti te zien, bestaande uit meer dan driehonderd originele paños, die de families hem de afgelopen zeven jaar toestuurden.

Hieronder, en op deze Tumblr-pagina, kun je alvast wat van de zakdoeken zien. De expositie wordt vrijdag 23 januari om 18.00 uur geopend in galerie Libertine aan de Prinsengracht 715 in Amsterdam, en is te zien tot en met 6 februari.

Brasilian

A tradição do paño (do espanhol «pañuelo», que significa «lenço») começou nas instituições correcionais norte-americanas da Costa Oeste em algum ponto dos anos 40. Na época, decorar lenços era a única maneira que prisioneiros mexicanos analfabetos tinham para se comunicar com o mundo exterior. Até hoje, paños ainda são enviados para amigos e familiares em vez de cartas, enquanto, em certas prisões, os lenços são uma forma popular de moeda.

A maior parte das obras são imagens que lembram tatuagens: caveiras, palhaços, bandidos e pin-ups desenhados em musselina com caneta

esferográfica. Os temas vão do religioso ao pornográfico, com elementos decorativos como peitos, ursinhos de pelúcia, caveiras e unicórnios se alternando repetidamente como se tivessem sido concebidos juntos. Os panos mostram que mesmo os criminosos mais durões desenham um cartão para a mãe no dia das mães.

Até recentemente, os panos raramente saíam dos muros das penitenciárias ou das casas dos parentes dos detentos. Cinco anos atrás, enquanto pesquisava artefatos de prisão, o artista e colecionador Reno Leplat-Torti descobriu a arte dos panos e começou a colecioná-los. Hoje, sua coleção, que conta com mais de 200, vem sendo exposta em galerias da Europa.

Saiba mais sobre a coleção de Leplat-Torti aqui.

Tradução: Marina Schnoor

Greek

Γυναικεία Στήθη, Κρανία και Mickey Mouse: Αυτά Ζωγραφίζουν οι Κρατούμενοι στις Φυλακές του Μεξικού

Η παράδοση του paño [όρος που προέρχεται από την ισπανική λέξη «pañuelo» που σημαίνει «μαντήλι»] ξεκίνησε στα σωφρονιστικά ιδρύματα της Δυτικής Αμερικής κοντά στη δεκαετία του 1940. Εκείνη την εποχή, το να ζωγραφίζουν μαντήλια ήταν ο μόνος τρόπος για τους αναλφάβητους Μεξικανούς κρατούμενους να επικοινωνήσουν με τον έξω κόσμο. Μέχρι και σήμερα, τα paño είναι συχνό φαινόμενο αντί γραμμάτων. Πέρα από τρόπος επικοινωνίας των κρατούμενων με την οικογένεια ή το φιλικό τους περιβάλλον, τα μαντήλια είναι και μια δημοφιλής μορφή ανταλλάγματος, σχεδόν σαν νόμισμα.

Τα περισσότερα έργα θυμίζουν σχέδια τατουάζ και απεικονίζουν κρανία, κλόουν, φορτηγά και pin-up girls, ενώ είναι ζωγραφισμένα πάνω σε μουσελίνα με ένα στυλό. Η θεματολογία τους κυμαίνεται από θρησκευτική μέχρι πορνογραφική, με διακοσμητικά στοιχεία, όπως γυναικεία στήθη, αρκουδάκια, σκελετούς και μονόκερους. Τα paños δείχνουν ότι ακόμη και οι πιο σκληροί εγκληματίες βρίσκουν τρόπο για να στείλουν μία ευχετήρια «κάρτα» στην μητέρα τους.

Μέχρι πρόσφατα, τα paños τα έβρισκε κανείς μόνο εντός των φυλακών και στα σπίτια των συγγενών και φίλων των κρατούμενων. Πριν από πέντε χρόνια, ενώ ερευνούσε αντικείμενα που είχαν βρεθεί σε φυλακές, ο συλλέκτης και καλλιτέχνης Reno Leplat-Torti ανακάλυψε την τέχνη των paños. Έτσι, έθεσε ως στόχο να συγκεντρώσει όσο το δυνατόν πιο πολλά. Αυτή τη στιγμή η συλλογή του Leplat-Torti μετρά πάνω από 200 κομμάτια, τα οποία εκθέτει σε γκαλερί σε όλη την Ευρώπη.

Μάθετε περισσότερα για την συλλογή του Leplat-Torti›s

Italian

La tradizione del paño [dallo spagnolo ‘pañuelo’, che significa ‘fazzoletto’] ha avuto inizio negli istituti penitenziari degli stati americani dell’ovest negli anni Quaranta del Novecento. A quel tempo, per un detenuto messicano analfabeta i fazzoletti erano l’unico modo per comunicare con il mondo esterno. Ancora oggi succede che i paños vengano inviati alle famiglie e agli amici al posto delle lettere; in alcune prigioni, i fazzoletti rappresentano anche una vera e propria forma popolare di valuta.

La maggior parte di questi fazzoletti presenta immagini simili a quelle dei tatuaggi: teschi, clown, macchine o pin-up disegnate sulla stoffa con una penna a sfera. I temi vanno dal religioso al pornografico, con elementi decorativi alternati ripetutamente come se fossero concepiti in coppie.

Fino a poco tempo fa, i paños erano poco conosciuti al di fuori delle prigioni o delle case dei famigliari dei carcerati. Cinque anni fa, mentre ricercava manufatti realizzati in prigione, l’artista e collezionista Reno Leplat-Torti si è imbattuto nell’arte del paño e ha cercato di raccoglierne il più possibile. Oggi la sua collezione conta più di 200 fazzoletti, che espone nelle gallerie di tutta Europa.

Scopri di più sulla collezione di Reno Leplat-Torti qui.

Spanish

Tetas, calaveras y Mickey Mouse: el arte de los presos mexicanos

La tradición del paño se inició durante la década de 1940 entre los muros de los correccionales del oeste de EU. En aquella época, la única forma que tenían los presos mexicanos analfabetos de comunicarse con el mundo exterior era decorando pañuelos. Todavía se siguen enviando paños a amigos y familiares en sustitución de las cartas y, en algunas penitenciarías, estas prendas constituyen una moneda de cambio muy popular.

La mayor parte de las decoraciones son dibujos de tatuajes, payasos, motos y chicas pin-up realizados con bolígrafo sobre tela de algodón. La temática abarca desde el porno hasta la religión, con motivos como tetas, ositos de peluche, calaveras y unicornios que se van alternando por parejas. Estos paños son una muestra de que hasta el más duro de los delincuentes tiene la suficiente sensibilidad como para elaborar un regalo artesanal para su madre.

Hasta hace poco, los paños pocas veces lograban salir de las cárceles o de las casas de sus destinatarios. Pero hace cinco años, mientras realizaba una investigación sobre objetos hallados en prisiones, el artista y coleccionista Reno Leplat-Torti descubrió el arte de los paños y empezó a coleccionar todos los que pudo. Actualmente su colección cuenta con más de 200 pañuelos y ha sido expuesta en galerías de toda Europa.

Aquí puedes encontrar más información sobre la colección de Leplat-Torti.

Romanian

Tradiția paño (de la spaniolul „pañuelo”, care înseamnă batistă) a început în închisorile de corecție din vestul SUA undeva prin 1940. La acel moment, decorarea șervețelelor era singura cale prin care prizonierii analfabeți puteau vorbi cu cei din afară. Până și azi, paño sunt destul de des trimise prietenilor și familiei în loc de scrisori, în timp ce în anumite închisori, șervețelele sunt un soi de valută.

Majoritatea lucrărilor seamănă cu tatuaje cu cranii, clovni, motocicliști și fete pin-up. Tematica variază de la religie până la pornografie, la care se adaugă elemente decorative ca sâni, ursuleți, cranii și inorogi. Paño demonstrează că până și cei mai duri criminali fac mamelor de ziua lor desene de mână.

Până recent, paño abia treceau de zidurile celulelor sau de pereții caselor prizonierilor. Acum cinci ani, în timp ce căutam printre lucrările artistului și colecționarului Reno Leplat-Torti, am descoperit arta asta a șervețelelor și am încercat să strâng cât mai multe posibile. În acest moment, colecția sa are peste 200 care au apărut și în galerii peste tot în Europa.

Serbian

Sise, lobanje i Miki Maus: Umetnost meksičkih zatvorenika

Tradicija paño (pañueloznači maramica na španskom) počela je da se pojavljuje četrdesetih godina prošlog veka u kazneno-popravnim ustanovama zapadnih američkih država. U to vreme, dekoracija maramica je bila jedini način za meksičke zatvorenike da komuniciraju sa spoljnim svetom. I danas se paños šalju prijateljima i porodici umesto pisma, dok u nekim zatvorima maramice imaju i određenu monetarnu vrednost.

Većina slika podseća na skice za tetovaže. Lobanje, klovnovi, lowrider automobili spuštenih karoserija i pin-up devojke česti su motivi, dok teme variraju od religioznih do pornografskih, sa dekorativnim elementima poput sisa, plišanih meda, lobanja i jednoroga. Paños zapravo pokazuju da čak i najžešći kriminalci mogu da nacrtaju čestitku majci.

Do nedavno, paños su bile nepoznate široj javnosti van zidina zatvora i ćelija. Pre pet godina, dok je proučavao život u zatvorima, kolekcionar Reno Leplat-Torti je otkrio umetnost pañosa i od tada se trudi da ih sakupi što više. Njegova kolekcija sada broji više od 200 komada koje predstavlja na izložbama širom Evrope.

Chinese

“帕诺”（paño）来自西班牙语中的 “pañuelo” 一词，意为 “手帕”。上世纪40年代，美国中西部地区的监狱里的墨西哥裔囚犯由于不懂英语，只能用手帕上的图案与外界沟通。直到今天，依然有罪犯会用手帕代替信件，交给高墙外面的家人或者朋友；在某些监狱中，这些手帕甚至扮演着流通货币的角色。

大多数手帕上的画作，就是这些罪犯们身上常见的纹身图案，比如骷髅啦、小丑啦、lowrider 或者 pin-up 女郎什么的，多是用圆珠笔在棉布上画出来的。画作的主题涉猎很广，从宗教到色情领域都有涉及，还有一些特殊的装饰元素，比如乳房、泰迪熊、骨头和独角兽等等。看着这些 “帕诺”，你甚至会觉得：就连那些最不思悔改的死硬罪犯，也会在母亲节时为妈妈送上手绘的贺卡。

曾经一度，这些帕诺手帕很少进入狱墙之外的寻常百姓家中；不过大概从五年前开始，专门研究监狱工艺品的艺术家兼收藏家 Reno Leplat-Torti 发现了这些手帕上的奥妙，并尽可能多地将它们收集起来。现在他收藏的监狱手帕已经超过了2000条，目前正在欧洲各地的画廊中展出。

Paños : L'art chiffonné des prisonniers chicanos

04/10/2016 | 16h08

© collection Reno Leplat-Torti

Depuis plus d'un siècle, les détenus mexicains des prisons du sud des États-Unis griffonnent sur leurs mouchoirs de poches des dessins à destination de leurs proches. Un art de l'évasion graphique qui s'expose en ce moment à Clermont-Ferrand, au Festival International des Textiles Extraordinaires.

"Certains d'entre vous ne comprennent pas ce qui se passe / Mais de toute façon ce n'est pas pour vous, c'est pour la Raza." En 1990, Kid Frost, premier rappeur chicano à connaître un succès international avec son morceau "La Raza" (littéralement "la race"), s'amusait de l'incapacité des gringos à saisir ce qui fait la fierté latino.

Et c'est sans doute cette même incompréhension qui a dû agiter les matons des prisons américaines lorsqu'ils ont commencé à voir circuler dans leurs

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Et c'est sans doute cette même incompréhension qui a dû agiter les matons des prisons américaines lorsqu'ils ont commencé à voir circuler dans leurs établissements des mystérieux mouchoirs de tissu ornés de dessins représentant des pin-up mexicaines, des cadillacs lowrider, des divinités aztèques, des visages grimés en clowns et autant de symboles de cette fameuse Raza. Baptisés "paños" par les prisonniers, ces morceaux de tissu ont en effet de quoi intriguer. Est-ce un moyen de communication entre détenus ? Une provocation envers les autorités carcérales ? Peut-être tout simplement de l'art pour l'art.

Éponger sa peine

Artiste sérigraphe, graphiste et auteur de comics, le français Reno Leplat-Torti a découvert les paños sur internet il y a quelques années, alors qu'il glanait ça et là des objets liés à l'univers des prisons. Depuis, il s'en ait fait une spécialité, au point de proposer une collection de plus de 200 mouchoirs dont une partie est exposée à Clermont-Ferrand jusqu'au 31 décembre, dans le cadre du Festival International des Textiles Extraordinaires.

"Il y a plusieurs théories différentes sur la naissance des paños. L'une des plus évidentes date du conflit entre la France et le Mexique au 19ème siècle. Les détenus illettrés n'avaient le droit d'avoir ni papier ni stylo. Pour communiquer avec leurs proches à l'extérieur, ils dessinaient donc sur le seul support qu'ils avaient : les carrés de tissu fournis dans leur package. Pour l'encre, ils l'a récupéraient ailleurs ou utilisaient du café," explique-t-il en précisant que s'il ne reste pas de trace des mouchoirs du 19ème, il possède tout de même dans sa collection un mouchoir de 1934, soit la plus vieille pièce recensée au monde.

Un flingue et des roses

Les thématiques abordées dans les paños varient en fonction de la personne à qui est destiné le mouchoir. Un bouquet de fleurs, une vierge ou un christ pour les parents, des personnages de cartoons pour les enfants, ou des images plus sombres inspirées du tatouage chicano pour les membres de gangs. Craignant que les paños ne servent à faire passer des messages aux gangsters de l'extérieur, de nombreuses prisons américaines ont donc commencé à embaucher des agents déchiffreurs de codes graphiques, ou tout simplement à censurer les mouchoirs en les confisquant.

Quitte à parfois passer à côté de la dimension purement artistique de cette pratique. "La raison pour laquelle je fais de l'art, c'est pour que ma famille se souvienne de moi si quelque chose m'arrive pendant ma peine, c'est la seule chose de moi que j'ai à donner," expliquait le prisonnier Manuel Montoya à Rudy Padilla, un travailleur social du Nouveau-Mexique qui a décidé de monter des expositions de paños aux États-Unis.

Sortir les mouchoirs

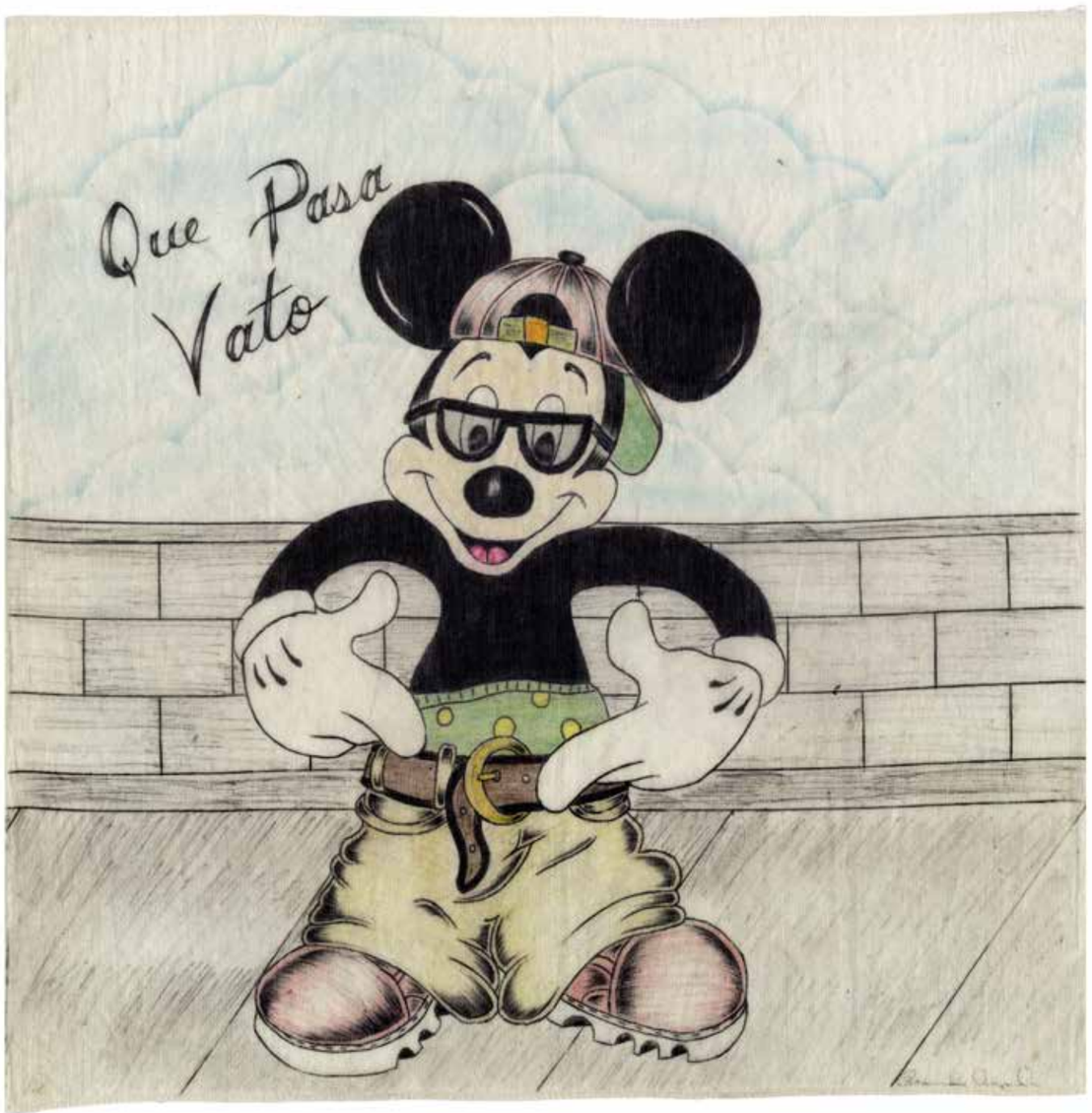
Mais si les mouchoirs servent donc souvent à éponger la douleur de l'enfermement tout en évitant de se faire oublier, leur utilité est parfois aussi plus prosaïque. Pour les détenus les plus doués en dessin (souvent d'anciens tatoueurs), ils sont par exemple une précieuse monnaie d'échange contre des biens et des services, un paquet de clopes ou une part de pizza supplémentaire.

Et une fois la peine purgée, les paños peuvent là aussi être utiles. Un rapide coup d'œil sur Ebay suffit par exemple à s'en rendre compte. "Beaucoup de détenus vendent leurs paños en sortant de prison. Ils sont toujours un peu surpris de voir l'intérêt que j'y porte, c'est comme si j'achetais leurs courriers. Mais pour eux, c'est avant tout un moyen de conjurer le sort et d'oublier les années passées derrière les barreaux. Ça permet à la famille de les décrocher du mur et de se faire un peu d'argent pour redémarrer dans la vie." commente Reno Leplat-Torti. Une manière de tourner la page, de sortir les mouchoirs d'adieu et de jeter définitivement les clefs de leur sinistre atelier d'artistes de 9 mètres carré.

Simon Clair - Les inrocks 10/2016

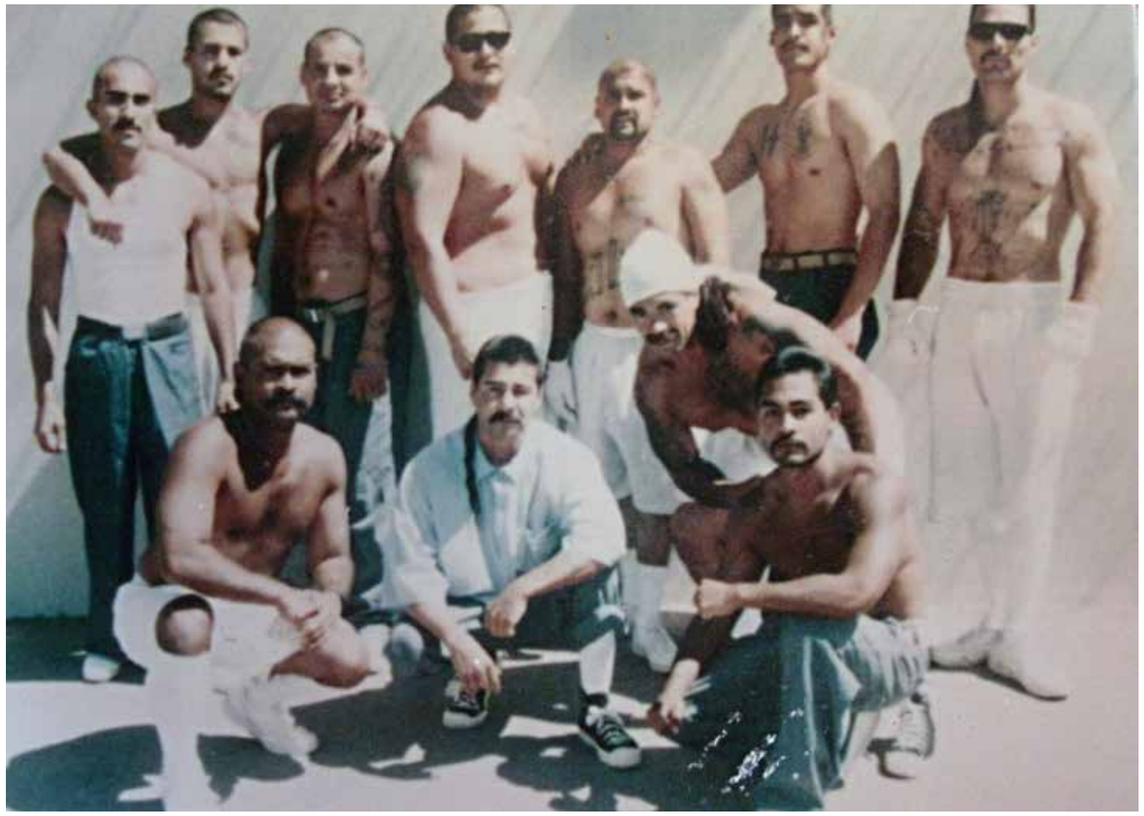
Anonym © Courtesy Collection Leplat-Torti

Anonym © Courtesy Collection Leplat-Torti



Anonym © Courtesy Collection Leplat-Torti

Joe Calderon et jeff Malmin, notre intermédiaire.



Ricardo Ramirez (en haut à gauche) et ses *prison homies*

Reno Leplat-Torti

©MM Yu

Reno Leplat-Torti, born in 1984 in Marseille, is a silkscreen artist, graphic designer, comic book writer, documentary filmmaker, collector. Issued from the graphzine, he joined the Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Nîmes where he founded the publishing house Nunu. Ten years ago, gleaning on internet small artifacts made in prison, he discovered the art of paños. Struck by the power of both the subject and the form, he takes contact with the families of american prisoners and then of prisoners by snail mail and now has a collection of more than 400 handkerchiefs presented in many galleries and museum in Europe.

Reno Leplat-Torti

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Artistic Curriculum Vitae

Exhibitions (selection) :

The exhibition Paños, Reno Leplat-Torti's collection has been presented at La milonga del'angel in Nîmes (FR) in october 2011, at Going Blind gallery in Grenoble (FR) en février 2012, at Monte en l'air in Paris in march 2012, at Cri de l'encre gallery in Lyon (FR) in october 2012, at MOHS Gallery in Copenhagen (DK) in january 2013, at Lycaon in Brussells (BE) in february 2013, at MRAC in Sérignan (FR) in april 2013, at le Dernier Cri in Marseille (FR) in may 2013, at ChantierBoiteNoire gallery in Montpellier (FR) and in From point to point gallery in Nimes (FR) in september 2013, at le Salon in Paris in april 2014, at Quai Branly in Paris in may 2014, at galerie Central in Liège (BE) in november 2014, at Libertine Gallery, Amsterdam (january 2015). Recyclart, Bruxelles (may 2015). U10, Belgrade (november 2015). Royal Museum, Toronto (may 2016). FITE, Musée Bargoin, Clermont Ferrand, FR (june 2016). Field Museum, Chicago (october 2016). La Jetée, Montpellier FR (march 2017). Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County (november 2017). Casa de Francia, Mexico (december 2017). Taco Ché, Tokyo (may 2018).Uplink, Tokyo (may 2018). Modern and Contemporary Latin American and Latino Art, Long Beach, Californa (august 2018). To come : Musée Confluence, Lyon. Musée International de la croix rouge, Genêve. Musée de l'hygiène, Dresde. Musée des Beaux-arts, Die FR (26). Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts,Taiwan.

El Ultimo Grito. Le Dernier Cri's author. Mexico city. Mexico (October 2011)

Eyjafjallajökull. J-A Arzilier, P-G Coste, P.Garcia, A.Giroux et R. Leplat-Torti. Galerie Iconoscope in Montpellier (June 2010)

Visible I & 11. L'Atelier (Collective : Jean-Adrien Arzilier, Abdelkader Benchamma, Armelle Caron, Pierre-Guilhem Coste, Pablo Garcia, Alexandre Giroux, Renaud Leplat-Torti, Mickaël Viala) Galerie Aldebaran à Castries (March and may 2010)

DC Kristmas XXX. Le Dernier Cri's author. 5 place in Marseille. (January 2008)

Le Dernier Cri /15 ans de suractivation grafike. Le Dernier Cri's author. Espace Beaurepaire, Paris (September 2007)

Mulhouse 007 Sélected to represent the Nîmes's fine art school (June 2007)

Fromage et dessert. 5°grade students. Nîmes's fine art school (May 2006)

Ex Naturæ. Hubert Duprat's initiativ. Natural history Museum in Nîmes *(*April 2006)

Publications (sélection) :

Dopeman intégral. (to come in september 2013, Le Dernier Cri)

Paños. (Janvier 2012, Le Dernier Cri) *Paños Chicanos.* (Mai 2013, MRAC Sérignan)

Dues to meat, *a Stu Mead video portrait.* DVD documentaire (Juin 2011, Le Dernier Cri)

Le Beau Temps I et II. Experimental revue (Octobre 2009 et février 2010)

L'Horreur est Humaine (Vol.2 N°1) (Juin 2008 , Éditions Humeurs)

Hôpital Brut 08 (2007, Le Dernier Cri)

La Meilleure Façon d'Empiler les Bonbons (2005 , Éditions Hôtel Rivet)

CCU (2002, Nunu Editions)

WE Apologie (2001, self-published)

Résidences :

September 2011	Galerie ChantiersBoîteNoire, Montpellier
July to September 2010	École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Montpellier Agglomération
June 2010	Galerie Iconoscope, Montpellier
March to June 2010	Galerie Aldebaran, Castries (34)
February 2010	Galerie St Ravy, Montpellier
April/May 2007	*Munzstrasse 10*, Berlin (dans le cadre du réseau l'Age d'Or)

Professional experience :

Since 2016	Permanent currator at galerie la jetée, Montpellier France
Since 2011	Paños collector and curator of the exhibition.
2011	Founder and designer of the website www.arqaeda.com a website with the aim to bring together a network of editors, filmmakers, music labels around the dissemination of independent cultural and artistic products.
2009	Founder of the artist collective L'Atelier (Abdelkader Benchamma, Armelle Caron, Grout / Mazéas ...) whose main objective is to establish a workshop and printing by pooling the technical member.
2008	Founder and artistic director of the «Fuck Off». The «off» of the Angoulême festival
April 2005	Founder and president of the publishing house Nunu aimed discovery, dissemination and promotion of young artists through different media (drawing, music and video ...)
Since 2000	Designing posters, flyers, illustrations, zines, newspapers, books and catalogs: - The Regional Museum of Contemporary Art Sérignan, School of Fine Arts in Nîmes, the School of Fine Arts in Montpellier Agglomeration, the publishing house Hotel Rivet, Nunu editions, Le Dernier Cri ... - For artists including Olivier Mosset, Tania Mouraud, Hubert Duprat, Cécile Bart, Yves Bélorgey Abdelkader Benchamma, Armelle Caron, Jean-Jacques Rousseau ...