



# NEO MEXICANISM

JUNE 28 - SEPTEMBER 28, 2014

**Neo-Mexicanism** refers to **representational** art made in Mexico between the mid-1980s to the early 1990s. **Neo-Mexicanism** uses **popular** Mexican **symbols** and seems to promote **stereotypical** ideas about Mexican **identity** at first glance. Created during a tumultuous time in Mexico's history, the work actually **critiques popular** notions of what it means to be Mexican.

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*Use this exhibition guide to learn  
more about Neo-Mexicanism!*

# Nationalism and *Mexicanidad*



Francisco Zúñiga (Costa Rica/Mexico, 1912-1998). *Los chamucos*, 1981. Lithograph on paper, 22 x 30 in. P.158

After the **Mexican Revolution**, a **movement** to establish a new **identity** took hold. The government endorsed **Mexicanidad**, a collection of experiences, styles and icons believed to be authentically and particularly Mexican.

This **nationalist**, post-Revolution **identity** rejected European standards and adopted objects and ideas related to the indigenous populations of Mexico. Artists like Diego Rivera and Francisco

Zúñiga embraced this **movement**. They began depicting national heroes as well as peasants, and used patriotic **symbols** like the Mexican flag in their work. Traditional or **popular** arts and costumes became fashionable. While the purpose of this **movement** was to create a style and art Mexicans could call their own, it also resulted in objects and beliefs that many people believed **stereotyped** the Mexican experience.



**THINK ABOUT IT:** Why would people think that **Mexicanidad** shows only a **stereotype** of Mexicans and their culture?



To see paintings and photographs related to **Mexicanidad** by artists like Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti, scan the code or go to <http://bit.ly/SACQ3i>

## Neo-Mexicanism



Javier de la Garza (Mexico, 1954)  
*Estructuras/Structures*, 1990  
Oil on canvas, 79 x 72 in.  
F.95.62



### THINK ABOUT IT:

What types of circumstances or events make citizens feel disappointed in or ashamed of their country?

**Neo-Mexicanism** emerged in the mid-1980s, when a series of economic and natural disasters caused Mexicans to question the effectiveness of their government. In the face of these problems, they struggled with the **nationalism** still being promoted by the Mexican State.

**Neo-Mexicanist** artists responded to this crisis through their art. Because they borrowed **symbols** from *Mexicanidad*, the images appear to celebrate Mexican culture and **identity**. They included figures like revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata, images from *Lotería* (Mexican bingo) and representations of Aztec warriors in their work. They did not use these patriotic **symbols** triumphantly, however, but in an **ironic** and sometimes sinister way. The dark humor of the paintings undermines **popular** images, conveying the artist's **critique** of the enthusiastic, unquestioning **nationalism** promoted by the government.



To learn more about the events in the 1980s that affected Mexican patriotism, scan the code or go to <http://bit.ly/1xL8PhS>

# Activity: Fan Grid

**Nationalism** is defined as devotion and loyalty to one’s country. It is like being a fan of a specific nation or country. What are you devoted to? In the grid below, write in the names of the people, groups, teams or artists to whom you are loyal. Include a **symbol** or picture that could represent them.

<b>Sport or Athletic Team:</b>	<b>Musician, Artist, Band or Celebrity:</b>
<b>What symbol did you use?</b>	<b>What symbol did you use?</b>
<b>Country or Culture:</b>	<b>Other (Choose your own):</b>
<b>What symbol did you use?</b>	<b>What symbol did you use?</b>



## Popular Imagery

Along with **nationalist symbols**, **Neo-Mexicanist** artists also used **popular** images in their work. Some came from television, films, music or advertising. Others were taken from folk art or everyday objects.

Alejandro Colunga bases his paintings on **popular** stories with magical elements. He combines representations of indigenous deities with folk objects and beliefs to create mysterious works of art. He explores **identity** by investigating the stories and **symbols** passed on through Mexican culture.

**Neo-Mexicanists** also borrowed images from magazine advertisements and movie posters. *October-Students Killed in Uprising* transforms a magazine ad into a statement on a controversial event from modern Mexican history. **Neo-Mexicanists** compared propaganda and marketing techniques to the way the Mexican government spread the idea of a Mexican **identity**.



To compare some artworks created by **Neo-Mexicanist** artists to the original images that inspired them, scan the code or go to <http://bit.ly/1n6J5Fy>



**Alejandro Colunga** (México, 1948)  
*El mago de la lluvia/ The Wizard of Rain*, 1988  
Oil on canvas  
39in. X 32 1/2in. / (99.06 cm x 82.55 cm)  
Robert Gumbiner Foundation Collection  
F.99.07



**Franco E. Méndez Calvillo** (Mexico, b. 1948)  
*October - Students Killed in Uprising*  
From the series *Los meses negros de Mexico / Black Months of Mexico*, n.d.  
Collage, paint on mag. Advertisement,  
10 1/2 in. x 10 3/4 in. (26.67 cm x 27.31 cm)  
Gift of Ann Janss  
M.2001.007

# Telling Their Own Stories and Challenging Stereotypes



Nahum B. Zenil (Mexico, b. 1947). *Retrato de boda / Wedding Portrait*, 1992.  
Lithograph on Paper, 21 in. x 28 in. (53.34 cm x 71.12 cm)  
Robert Gumbiner Foundation Collection. F.95.55

In establishing an **identity** that united all Mexicans, *Mexicanidad* produced **stereotypes** that not everyone agreed with. **Neo-Mexicanist** artists used their own experiences to challenge these stereotypes by telling their stories.

Nahum Zenil's self-portraits explore Mexican male **identity**. **Stereotypes** of Mexican men describe them as 'macho', aggressive and fearless. Men are discouraged from showing 'feminine'

qualities, like sensitivity or gentleness. All people are capable of acting in ways which reinforce or challenge **stereotypes**. Zenil uses humor to **critique** the limitations that machismo places on men. In *Wedding Portrait*, he shows himself as the various characters in a wedding party, including the bride, groom and flower girls. It reflects the complexity of his **identity**.



## THINK ABOUT IT:

Have people ever made assumptions about you based on your age, gender or the way you dress? What have you done to challenge those **stereotypes**?

# Super Identity Self-Portrait

Your **identity** is made up of characteristics that are unique to only you. What qualities do you have that set you apart from others? List those traits and then create your own superhero **identity** using symbols related to those characteristics.

## My Super Unique Identity

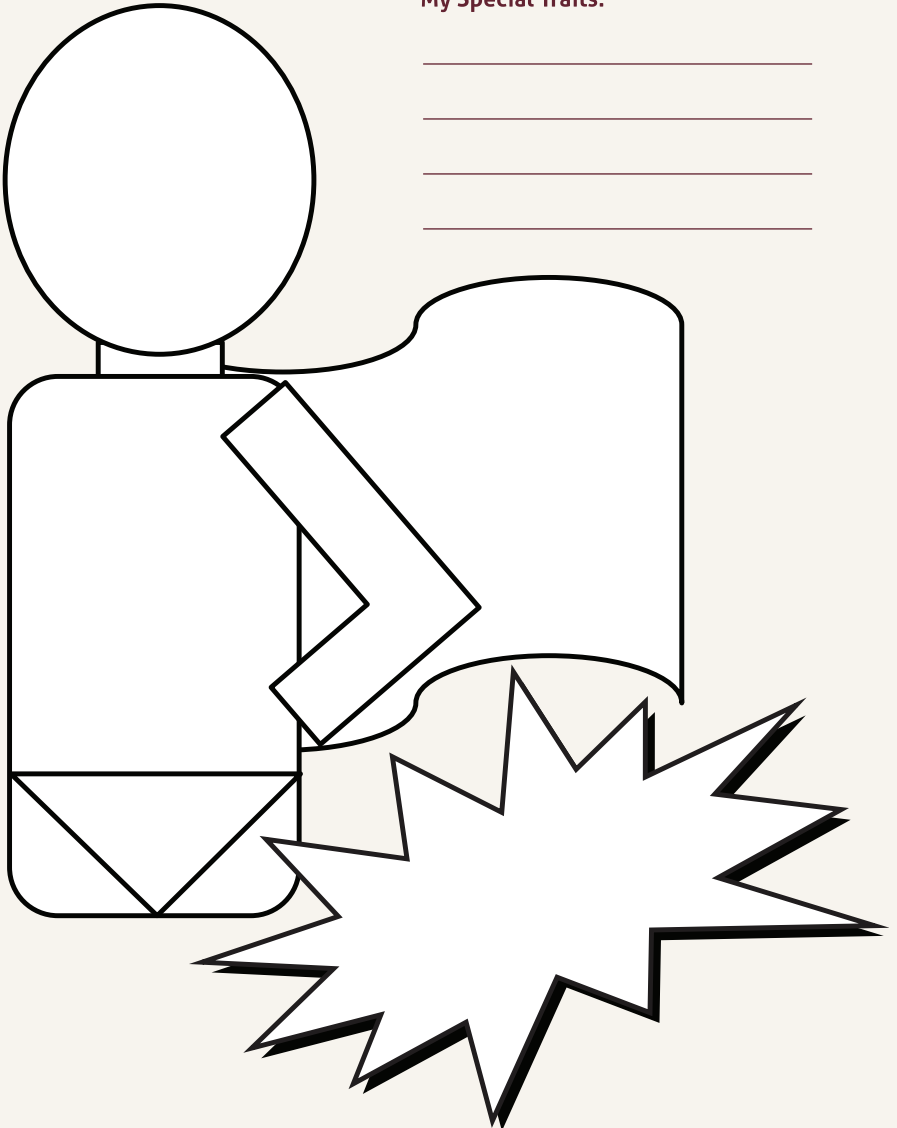
My Special Traits:

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# VOCAB & CREDITS

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## New Words

**Critique:** To talk about something, reflecting on both its good and bad parts.

**Identity:** Who someone is; the qualities which make up a person.

**Irony:** Satire or mockery of something or someone; the use of words or images to express an idea that is the opposite of its literal definition or meaning.

**Mexicanidad:** “Mexicanism,” an idea of what is Mexican as represented through objects, styles or ideas. Initially a post-Revolution movement, *Mexicanidad* rejected European ideas and embraced the indigenous origins of Mexico. The government promoted *Mexicanidad* through the commission of art works that reflected these post-Revolution values.

**Mexican Revolution:** An uprising that began in 1910 in order to abolish the corruption of the Porfirio Díaz dictatorship, which lasted 35 years. The revolution included governmental reform (through elections) and rural battles for land reform led by farmers and peasants. The violence that marked the revolution lasted into the early 1920s and overtook most of the country.

**Movement:** The activities by a group of people during a specific time, working to advance a particular cause or idea.

**Nationalism:** Devotion and loyalty to one’s country, often accompanied by the belief that one’s country is the best.

**Neo-Mexicanism:** Literally “new Mexicanism,” it refers to art from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s made by a specific group of artists. **Neo-Mexicanism** challenged fixed national and cultural identities.

**Popular:** Liked or appreciated by many people; an object or cultural expression which appeals to the general public. **Popular** culture or objects are often mass-produced and widely distributed.

**Representational:** Art that shows its subject in a recognizable, often realistic way.

**Stereotype:** An often unfair and untrue belief about all people who share a particular characteristic.

**Symbol:** A picture, color or object that suggests or stands in for an idea, belief or another object. For example, the bald eagle is recognized as a **symbol** of the United States.

Written by: **Gabriela Martínez**

Cover image:  
**Mónica Castillo** (Mexico, b. 1951)  
detail from *El plato de Zapata / Zapata’s Dish*, 1987  
Oil on canvas  
Courtesy of Nicholas Ingram

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