

LAS CURANDERAS | FROM ASHES, WE RISE

First entirely Latina art exhibit in Wisconsin ponders concept of fire

Samara Kalk Derby | Wisconsin State Journal • Sep 18, 2026

An art exhibition featuring work by 26 Latina artists from across Wisconsin, “Las Curanderas: From Ashes, We Rise,” opened Tuesday at Madison Area Technical College’s Truax Campus.



This piece, called “Catrina,” by Yesica Coria, is made from corn husk, chicken wire, papier-mâché and sawdust.
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It’s the first entirely Latina art exhibition in Wisconsin, according to Oscar Mireles, who in 2021 founded Latinos Organizing for Understanding and Development, or LOUD, the organization behind the show, which runs through Oct. 15.

“We asked artists to explore the literal or metaphorical concept of fire as destruction, transformation, rebirth and renewal,” said co-curator Jessica Gutiérrez, who has been a mental health therapist in Madison for the past 20 years and in private practice for the past two.

Artists were encouraged to draw inspiration from the song “María la Curandera” by Natalia Lafourcade, which includes the lines, in translation:

“Let all the pains turn to dust, let them turn to dust,

“May the fire burn them, may the fire burn them and new flowers come...

“Heal yourself, my girl, with the most beautiful love,

“And always remember that you are the medicine.”

Gutiérrez, 47, a Nicaraguan-American watercolor and mixed media artist, said she and her friend and co-curator, Issis Macias, put out a call to Latina artists to respond to the theme of rising from ashes.

During a time of political injustice and collective resistance, Gutiérrez said, they called on Latina artists to come together as “healers, truth-tellers and agents of transformation.”



This 2022 photograph from Che Correa is called
“ATABEY Mother of All Photography.”
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“Elha and Alba” by Juliet Maya.
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“At our core, we really wanted to do something to alchemize our pain into something powerful, to turn destruction into hope and to create a space for other Latina artists to do the same,” she said.

Gutiérrez chose not to showcase her own artwork in the exhibit, focusing instead on elevating others’ voices. At the opening reception, she said she had been moved to tears by the depth of the work.

Macias urged attendees to support the artists by purchasing their work or at least a print.

She noted that not all of the artists are full-time professionals. “We have a beautiful mix of artists that are showing for the first time, artists that are mid-career or emerging. I think that’s what makes this exhibition really special.”

Mireles, who served as Madison’s first Latino poet laureate from 2016 to 2018, compiled a catalog of the exhibit, available for \$30.

“You’ll be able to see this art and the amazing artists, and see their love and their passion that they put in their art,” he said.



Co-curator Jessica Gutiérrez, left, with Reyli Cerda-Martinez, an artist whose work is featured in the exhibit "Las Curanderas: From Ashes, We Rise."
 Reyli Cerda-Martinez



The group of artists from the exhibit, "Las Curanderas: From Ashes, We Rise," with Oscar Mireles at top, right.
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