

ALERT TOP STORY

OVERTURE CENTER | LATINO ART FAIR

## From Mexico City and L.A. to Madison, Latino artists find new opportunities at the Overture Center

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Rodrigo Carapia and Issis Macias talk about their collaborative work in the exhibit "Bajo el Mismo Cielo," or "Under the Same Sky," at the ninth annual Latino Art Fair taking place Friday.

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**F**or Madison artists Issis Macias and Rodrigo Carapia, being Latino means they can laugh over shared experiences.

For instance, as a Latino, it wouldn't be uncommon in the middle of a party roaring past midnight to see at least one child asleep on a couch, under a pile of coats or balanced on two fold-up chairs. Especially since, odds are, it was a children's party to begin with.

"My mom would take me for picnics in the park, but (in Mexico City) they were between these extremely busy highways. She'd just wave it off, 'I'm coming with you, you'll be fine,'" Carapia remembered, laughing.

The laugh, for Latinos, is paired with appreciation for how much effort the community always put into celebrating their children.

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The "Three Kings" celebration is derived from a traditional Latin American holiday based on the biblical wise men. Centro Hispano had its annual celebration Saturday, Jan. 21, giving away presents to children, having a mariachi band play live music, free food and face painting.

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An appreciation of these shared experiences is currently hung in front of the Overture Center’s State Street windows, uniting Macias and Carapia’s experiences in their first-ever collaborative exhibit.

Macias would first paint an abstract background, picking her colors intuitively. Then Carapia would paint an inspired image on top of it.

Translating to “Under the Same Sky,” Macias and Carapia’s “Bajo el Mismo Cielo” will be on display in the Overture Center for the Arts’ first-floor Rotunda Gallery until March 13.

### **New city program aims to break language barriers through relationships**

It will run coincide with the ninth annual Latino Art Fair from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Friday, also at the Overture Center.

A combination of colorful abstract paintings that feature drawings with hieroglyphic-like details between its line work, “Bajo el Mismo Cielo” may serve to inspire vendors to continue with their craft or inspire guests to start creating — especially those like Macias and Carapia, who are self taught.



Artist Rodrigo Carapia, who grew up in a neighborhood with plenty of mural art in Mexico City and was inspired by the Aztec style, has worked as a mural artist in Madison for the past 15 years. Among his most notable work is the Dane County Juvenile Detention Center mural from 2020.

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## Needed exposure

Sponsored by Latinos Organizing for Understanding and Development (LOUD) and the Overture Center, the Latino Art Fair has evolved from a small event that sold creative trinkets and prints into one that centers on the artist behind the merchandise, giving artists an opportunity to sell their work, gain a new audience and meet other artists going through similar experiences.

“As an artist, it takes a little while to build the level of work, enough things to sell, and build your confidence, where you would want to put yourself out there,” said Oscar Mireles, LOUD founder and a former mayoral appointee to the Overture Center board of directors.

Mireles became involved in the Latino Art Fair by participating as a poetry performer before joining in as a key organizer with LOUD, hoping to find new artists unsure of where to begin in an already limited market.

“There’s a finite number of days (an exhibit might run),” Mireles said. “There’s a finite number of spaces. There’s a finite number of venues.”

The fair serves as an avenue for both well- and less-known Latino artists to showcase their work to new audiences, regardless of their medium — canvases, prints, stickers, jewelry, pottery, photography, even music.

## Finding opportunity

“We’re all born artists and evolve as artists, but as kids start reaching a certain age, they start hearing, ‘OK, it’s time to put away the crayons,’” Carapia said.

### Día de los Muertos altars: 'Each is a little story'

“That’s when the art flow gets cut. After that you can take lessons, but the instinctive art flow is gone. Other skills are prioritized.”



For Issis Macias, the streaks of magenta in the collaborative work "Amor," a depiction of maternal love, represent the love she has for her daughter, while the image represents the love Rodrigo Carapia felt with his own mother -- tender, like an embrace, and protective, like the thorns near the heart at the bottom of the canvas.

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Despite each being well known now, Macias, an abstract artist, and Carapia, a muralist, vividly remember feeling insecure with where they stood as artists.

Having grown up in a neighborhood with plenty of mural art in Mexico City, Carapia was inspired by the Aztec art style and has worked as a mural artist in Madison for the past 15 years.

Carapia always had confidence in his natural-born talent, but his art style lacked novelty in Mexico and seemed to be too unfamiliar in Wisconsin.

"I think there's been positive change in the last couple of years. At first, I didn't really see a lot of opportunities, especially for artists based in a cultural style. It was very complicated," Carapia said.

## 'Tiny little fish'

Macias first became interested in the art world while in Los Angeles, while simultaneously developing her previous career in water resource management. But she felt like a "tiny little

fish" in comparison to some artists.



Artist Rodrigo Carapia, right, talks with Oscar Mireles, founder of Latinos Organizing for Understanding and Development, or LOUD, at the Overture Center. Mireles introduced Carapia to artist Issis Macias through his weekly art parties, which are free and open to Madison-area artists working in any medium.

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“I was like ... doing this as a hobby, a creative outlet,” Macias explained.

Then, in 2016, Macias moved with her partner to Madison, where her hidden talent would soon be discovered.

“In Madison, I met new friends. We went to my house and saw some of my paintings. They were like, ‘Oh, wow, I didn’t you know you paint!’”

One friend liked her work so much he asked Macias for a new piece, which led to his now-wife asking Macias to sell her artwork on the walls of her restaurant walls, La Kitchenette, on Williamson Street.

“I sold my first piece there,” Macias said.

“I’ve been very fortunate actually, to maintain my hand in my culture,” she said. One of five daughters, Macias fondly remembers taking several family road trips from Los Angeles to Mexico, visiting authentic flea markets, celebrating with extravagant parties and shopping for local specialties such as leather and fabrics.

## The collaboration

Having met through weekly art parties Mireles hosts for Madison art communities, Macias and Carapia formed a friendship before first collaborating last year.

“We first experimented last year with two small pieces,” Macias said.

But despite having only general ideas even then, their visions instantly clicked.

“So, that was the connection with Rodrigo. He stirred up all those memories, I could have conversations that he understood, and understand the humor.”

Together, their work shares themes of grief, youth, migration, motherhood and Mexican culture.

“I wanted to capture as much depth as possible. I wanted layers of culture to come through, but I mostly wanted to use emotion, have a different feeling for each,” Carapia said. “It could be evocative images, like the experience of immigrating, or something tender, like the love of a mother.”

“I think what’s most special is that the Latino community can now come to a place like the Overture, and say, ‘Hey look, they have a luchador (a Mexican wrestler), a sugar skull or a Xolo dog,’” Macías said.



In the only piece made solely by Rodrigo Carapia in the collaborative exhibit "Bajo el Mismo Cielo," Carapia uses a white background and darkened corners to challenge the viewer to keep their sight on the image even longer.

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The Latino Art Fair serves to expand this welcome, providing a full promenade hall and terrace full of Latino artists and vendors.

“The artisans, they’re going back to the communities where the art was created, they’re getting a certain authenticity,” Míreles said. “There’s almost a level of tradition, which has a nice feel, but with a 21st-century kind of spin-off.”

## U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson discussing issues at the Milwaukee Latino roundtable