The purpose of public art is to create a dialogue.”

–Luis Jiménez
Schedule of Events

April 30, 6:00 p.m. - Lecture
Lecture by artist Luis Jiménez in Holmberg Hall.

April 30, 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. - Opening Reception
Opening (free) of “Luis Jiménez: Working-Class Heroes: Images from the Popular Culture” which runs through August 8, 1999. Sponsored by El Chico’s Mexican Restaurants and Sooner Beers with music by guitarist Edgar Cruz.

May 2, 1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. - Family Day
Cinco de Mayo Family Day, free artmaking activities based on the Jiménez exhibition.

May 5, noon - “Luis Jiménez and Public Sculpture,” Focus Tour
Free 30-minute tour of the public sculptures created by Jiménez.

May 12, noon - “Printmaking During the Mexican Revolution,” Focus Tour
Free 30-minute discussion of the printmaking style developed by Mexican artists at the beginning of the Mexican Revolution in 1910.

May 19, noon - “The Lithographs of Luis Jiménez,” Focus Tour
Free 30-minute tour of the lithographs created by Luis Jiménez and discussion of the printmaking technique of lithography.

May 26, 7:15 a.m. - 8:30 a.m. - Business Before Hours
Norman Chamber of Commerce morning social with refreshments and a look at the Jiménez exhibition.

About the Museum

The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, on the corner of Boyd and University at the University of Oklahoma, is a union of the effort of many artists and visionaries. In large part, however, it is a combination of the dream of the man, Oscar Brusoe Jacobson, and the generosity of another couple, Mr. and Mrs. Fred Jones of Oklahoma City.

When Oscar Jacobson became director of the School of Art in 1915, there was only one art class on campus. Supplies for drawing and painting were scarce, and sculpting materials non-existent. Though a few wealthy families had private collections, there were no art museums or collections in the state available to the public, and the art center nearest to Norman was as far afield as St. Louis. Undaunted by these challenges, Jacobson envisioned an art school which nurtured its students to develop to their fullest potential.

Jacobson’s vision of a permanent facility to house the art finally came to fruition in 1971, when Mr. and Mrs. Fred Jones donated a fine arts building to the university in honor of their son, Fred Jones Jr. The resulting structure, the Fred Jones Jr. Memorial Art Center, houses the Museum of Art, which contains 15,000 square feet of exhibition space: the School of Art, and the administrative offices of the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art.

College of Fine Arts.

Over the years, the museum’s permanent collection has grown exponentially through the generosity of donors such as Max Wetzenthaler and the Jerome Westheimer family. In 1996, with a $1 million gift from Mrs. Fred Jones, OU President and Mrs. David L. Boren spearheaded the successful fundraising campaign to acquire the important collection of the late Richard H. and Areline L. Fleischaker of Oklahoma City. This large group of primarily Native American and Southwestern art boosted the museum to a new level.

Currently directed by Dr. Eric M. Lee, the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art is today one of the finest art museums in the region. Strengths of the 6,500-object permanent collection include twentieth-century American painting and sculpture, contemporary art, traditional and contemporary Native American art, art of the Southwest, ceramics, Asian art, and European graphic from the sixteenth century to the present. Several temporary exhibitions are mounted annually which explore the art of various periods and cultures.

Further information about programs or accommodations on the basis of disability may be had by calling 405/325-3272 or visiting the museum Web site, www.ou.edu/jima.

About the Museum

Commentary

I don’t understand bagpipe music. That is to say when I hear it, I don’t feel that glow of pride that I see in others, who I can tell are probably of some white European ancestry. I do, however, see beauty in their pride and almost blush with happiness for the excitement they seem to derive from something embedded in their collective unconsciousness.

It gives me hope that perhaps there is something inside me—a sense of identity they may feel rooted more deeply in their souls than in the clothes they wear and the cars they drive—but I still don’t understand bagpipe music. I don’t feel it in my soul. However, I would never call it ugly or attempt to dehumanize the art form in any way.

You should hear my grandmother’s stories and see the passion in her eyes when she tells them, delving into her past and bringing back great tales full of color, struggle, love and determination. For instance, when her mother’s family moved to south Texas from Mexico, they worked hard, growing sugar cane on a farm for the owners, all of whom were white.

In fact, one evening, on the night of a great storm, her uncle was riding in the field, looking for his brothers, when a sugar cane stalk blew through his leg and knocked him from his horse. His brothers found him there hours later, his blood seeping into the earth, and took him home. When the father died, the oldest living son, a young man, was now the head of the family, and life moved on. Still are the customs of my grandmother’s people—my people—and like most cultures, ours is different from any other in the world.

Ours is a culture full of pride and color. Look at Hispanic artists like Pablo Picasso and Freda Kahlo, whose work is as rich in symbolism and mythology as it is in color and music. It is the work of a people who are proud to be who they are, and that, in itself, is a dying art. It is the work of a people who are passionate about the blood that flows through their veins and the history forged and the struggles overcome by their descendants in order to ensure the survival of that blood. I have written before about the importance of knowing one’s heritage. Not only do we instill an innate pride and sense of identity, but it also adds to the richness of our world. Such differences should be celebrated and brought closer to one another, rather than cause intolerance and rifts in the fabric of our delicate society.

I have spoken to many of my white friends and heard them voice their concern about the future of American Indian culture. I have heard them called “scary,” “gaudy,” and “ugly” to name a few “choice” adjectives. I laughed when I heard someone say “they [the new sculptures] make that horse look precious,” shook my head, and walked away. I don’t even argue with people anymore because I have grown so disheartened and disgusted by the ignorance demonstrated by my fellow students.

Aren’t we here to learn, to appreciate new things, to find knowledge we never knew as children?

Jiménez’s work celebrates many facets of life as a Hispanic person, both in America and abroad. He celebrates mythology, music, popular Hispanic culture, tradition, non-tradition and, first and foremost, the working class. His art is a tribute to people who, like my great uncle, were not handed prominence on a silver platter.

Look closely at the hands of the people he creates—the veins, the lines, the roughness of the skin, darkened by the heat of the sun and the soil of the earth. These are people with a story that is, perhaps, unlike the story of your great-grandparents, but it is a story nonetheless.

Jiménez is passionate about his work and, more importantly, his roots, and we should all learn from his example.

Consider this as you look at his art, and make no mistake, it is art in its purest form, full of the color of the Hispanic people, indicative of our heritage and the heritage of our ancestors. Learn about his art, and celebrate other cultures as well as your own.

Know that there is beauty in things, which, although you may not fully appreciate it, is beauty nonetheless. That in itself is an act of elegance more perfect and thoughtful than any work of art can ever be.
Review by John Brandenburg

People have reacted strongly, pro or con, to Luis Jiménez’s monumental, multi-colored sculptures which have been installed recently near the University of Oklahoma’s Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art—and this certainly is one of the functions of art, to make people respond.

After all, they aren’t made from the time-honored sculptural medium of bronze, but from that newer, glitzy, and some would say kitsch material, fiberglass, with a gleaming urethane finish, which people tend to associate more with racing cars and speed boats than fine art.

In fact, an 8-foot tall sculpture of a rearing mustang whose red eyes light up at night, given by the Jerome Westheimer family, began sparking controversy with its flailing hooves, almost as soon as it was installed last summer near the intersection of Boyd and Elm streets.

But it would be a pity if visitors let themselves be distracted from the power of the ideas, earthy satiric humor and energetic execution of the paintings, drawings and prints as well as monumental fiberglass sculptures and maquettes found in a show of his work at the OU museum.

Circulated by Exhibits USA, a division of Mid-America Arts Alliance, the “Luis Jiménez: Working-Class Heroes: Images from the Popular Culture” exhibit opens Friday, April 30, with a talk by the 58-year-old Hispanic-American artist at 6 p.m. and a reception from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Covering from 1967 to the present, the show lets us study the connections—sometimes direct and sometimes much less—between the artist’s graphic and sculptural creations, as well as appreciate the power of his paintings, drawings and prints for their own sake.

Except for bulging, comic book style red letters spelling out part of the title in the print, a direct tie exists between a 1983 color lithograph and a 1981 fiberglass sculpture of a muscular “Sodbuster, San Isidro,” bending over a plow, driving a pair of even more muscular oxen.

Similarly, there is little difference between the artist’s 1976 fiberglass maquette of a “Vaqueiro,” riding a wildly bucking horse, and a 1981 color lithograph of the same subject—except for the title being spelled out in glittering red letters over the man’s head in the print.

Much less direct is the relationship between his 1993 color lithograph and 1994 fiberglass maquette of a “Steelworker.”

In this case, the print is more dynamic, due to the subject’s forceful but unforced pose, standing in front of a moiré, flowing cauldron, holding a wrench, while the maquette’s taller, sentinel-like figure leans on a long-handled spoon for hot metal as if it were a prophet’s staff.

Even more intriguing is the tie between a delicate 1969 colored pencil sketch of a “man on fire,” who looks more like he’s being crucified, and a commanding, beautifully rendered glass sculpture, done the same year, of an all-red, flaming figure, raising one arm like a fiery wing.

An intriguing comparison also exists, utilizing the strengths of each medium, between a 1985 black-and-white lithograph and a 1989 fiberglass-urethane sculpture, both dealing with the highly charged subject of Mexicans crossing the border into the United States.

The print offers us a wonderfully folksy and moving image of a family of “illegals,” carrying their belongings under a silver of moon, and the streamlined yet poignant sculpture depicts a man carrying his wife and baby on his shoulders during a “Border Crossing.”

Only loosely related, but hilarious, is a 1969 drawing of a sexy female “Bartly with Cigarettes,” wearing a head ornament like lady liberty’s, and a 1979 fiberglass sculpture of “The Bartly—Statue of Liberty” in a cheesy outfit, holding a frothy glass of beer aloft like a torch.

Almost equally funny, and bitingly satiric, is a fiberglass sculpture, done the same year, of an heavyweight perhaps pregnant pink “Sunbather,” using a newspaper to cover his or her face, but ignoring its disturbing headlines.

An outdoor fiberglass sculpture of a couple doing a hat dance at a fiesta is not nearly as lively and expressive as the artist’s color lithographs of a “raunchy couple” doing a “Texas Waltz” and a group of serpentine dancers at a “Honky Tonk.”

Colorful and engaging, but less convincing and effective are his fiberglass sculptures of a “Southwest Fiesta with Snake and Eagle” and of the “End of the Trail (with Electric Sunset)—a statue of a masked Indian horseman in which the setting sun is represented by pulsating lights.

Much more successful, especially in expressing the artist’s Southwestern and Hispanic roots, are many of the masterful drawings and prints included in the exhibit which don’t relate, directly or indirectly, to his sculptural creations.

Jiménez gives a wonderful undertone of lurid romance to his 1983 color lithograph of a man with a “Rose Tattoo” putting his arm around a female fatale in a red dress, enclosed within the lush, padded interior of a customized car with its own, built-in bar.

A black female cotton picker toils beside a white horsemans underlining the irony of a “Thomas Jefferson Quote” on inequality in a hardtinning, hand-colored 1980 collagraph and a 1992 lithographic dipstyk of a “drunk” saluting a skeletal Carson with his bottle on a street corner.


Offering a nice counterpoint to these politically charged works are a group of self-portrait lithographs and watercolor and colored pencil studies of children and adults gazing quietly back at the artist, plus one of an old man with eyes closed, breathing with the help of an oxygen tube.

Somewhat more moody and introspective, but no less moving, is a series of self-portrait lithographs in which the artist confronts us directly, seemingly contemplating his own mortality, without a trace of exaggeration or sentimentality.

Culminating in a giant, 30-foot high, 9-canvass crayon and acrylic painting of a mustang on the vast western interior wall of the gallery space, the Jiménez exhibit shouldn’t be missed, especially by critics of his work—during its run at the OU museum.

Following Friday’s opening, it is scheduled to remain on display through August 8 at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, 410 W Boyd, in Norman.

EXHIBITION SCHEDULE 1999-2000
FRED JONES JR. MUSEUM OF ART

April 30 - August 8, 1999
“Luis Jiménez: Working-Class Heroes: Images from the Popular Culture”

Indoor and outdoor sculptures, works on paper, paintings, drawings and prints by the artist who created the museum’s own "Mustang."

August 27 - November 28, 1999
“The American West: Celebrating the Opening of the Charles Russell Center”

Western art from the Museum’s permanent collection, curated to complement the works in the new Charles M. Russell Center for the Study of Art of the American West.

January 21 - March 11, 2000
“School of Art Faculty Exhibition”

Works by School of Art studio faculty, including film and video, graphic design, sculpture, painting and drawing, printmaking, ceramics and photography.

March 30 - April 30, 2000
“86th Annual School of Art Student Exhibition”

Juried art show by School of Art students.

“Border Crossing (Cruzando El Rio Bravo),” 1989, fiberglass with urethane finish (Courtesy of the artist).

“I was really struck with the social situation around the part [Central Park, Los Angeles, where a copy of the sculpture is located]. There are a lot of Central Americans around the park and a lot are illegal. I had wanted to make a piece that was dealing with the issue of the illegal alien. People talked about the aliens as if they weren’t really people. I wanted to put a face on them, I wanted to hold them up. I also wanted to deal with the whole idea of family... I was just starting a new family. We had just had Adam. I went back to my experience in El Paso where it is a common sight. The men carry the women across the river so they don’t get wet. In this case she’s carrying a child. It was a way of consolidating the family idea and the idea of the illegal alien.”

Credits

Cover and museum photos by Jaconna Aguirre

Layout design by Dustin Tate
About the Artist

There are no wrong ways to respond to the work of Luis Jiménez. There are only different ways of looking at it,” according to Benito Huerta, curator of the exhibition “Working Class Heroes: Images from the Popular Culture,” which is on view at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art from April 30 through August 8, 1999. Jiménez’s art is meant for everyone, not just a select few, so his preference in art is public sculpture. Likewise, he chooses to work in fiberglass because it is an everyday, familiar material instead of a rarefied medium more traditionally associated with sculpture, such as bronze.

The artist is represented in the permanent collection of many major art museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Dallas Museum of Art. Those who have visited Santa Fe may remember Jiménez’s “Border Crossing” on the Plaza.

About the Art

Selected Pieces from the Exhibition “Luis Jiménez: Working Class Heroes: Images from the Popular Culture,” along with narrative by Luis Jiménez, are pictured at right.

“Self Portrait #11, 1995, hand-colored lithograph with hologram, Courtesy The Barrett Collection, Dallas, Texas.

“Honky Tonk,” 1981, lithograph and glitter, Artist proof 1/10 (Courtesy of the artist).

“Not only have I worked on nudes periodically, but I’ve also done drawings of my friends. I didn’t quite know what to do with the drawings of my friends, so what I finally decided to do was to put them in the Honky Tonk. Almost all of the figures are friends that I’ve taken liberties with, and I just do them as large drawings and cut them out and stick them in the Honky Tonk.”

“Vaquero,” 1981, lithograph and glitter, Artist proof 5/10 (Courtesy of the artist).

“When I proposed it [Vaquero] for downtown Houston, for Tranquility Park, the architect for the park even went so far as to mention that putting the piece in would improve the weak points in his own design. But the city fathers didn’t like the idea of this Mexican cowboy with a gun in the middle of downtown Houston and ended up suggesting finding an alternative site. The alternative site that they picked was Moody Park, which was the location of the riots that they had after the police had killed a young Chicano boy. My feeling was that it was good. If in fact, it was going into a community that could relate to it.”

“Fiesta Dancers (Janabe),” 1996, fiberglass with urethane finish (Courtesy of the artist).

“With the ‘Fiesta Dancers’ I was looking for an image that people could relate to on both sides of the border. In the Southwest we have a tradition of having the fiestas, which of course we’ve inherited from our Mexican past. We have them in San Antonio, in Tucson, in other places as well. Here in the valley we have the fiesta dancers from the Hondo School. They’ve gone all over the country doing the old Mexican dances. The tradition is still very much alive here in the valley.”

“Howl,” 1977, lithograph, Artist proof V (Courtesy of the artist).

“In 1976, I did the ‘Howl’ print. I was surprised that it went that far. But at that point it was going beyond a portrayal of a coyote/dog; it was becoming something more primal. Eventually I began doing lots of studies of the endangered Mexican wolf, the wolf native to New Mexico, and then did the sculpture of ‘Howl.’”


“I’ve looked at folk art, because I really think that’s people’s art. If you look at the way the hair forms and the beard forms are organized in the ‘Sodbuster’ man’s face and the sweat beads on his forehead, it’s very much the way the folk art sculptures are done in New Mexico. The sweat beads are very much like the blood beads on the Christ figures here in New Mexico, and in Mexico, the same sort of emphasis on the man’s arms, the muscles, the same kind of exaggeration and distortion: obviously a lot of stylization but consistent with what happens with folk art.”

All photos courtesy Exhibits USA, A National Division of Mid-America Arts Alliance with the State Arts Council of Oklahoma.

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