

CARLOMAGNO PEDRO MARTÍNEZ biography

Born in 1965 in San Bartolo Coyotepec, Oaxaca, Mexico
Resides in San Bartolo Coyotepec, Oaxaca, Mexico

EDUCATION

1982 Attended the Rufino Tamayo Workshop

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 1983 Imagen y Semejanza. Cerámica de Carlomagno, Capilla del Hotel Presidente (Oaxaca, Mexico)
- 1985 Carlomagno, Taller de Artes Plásticas Rufino Tamayo Gallery (Oaxaca, Mexico)
Raíces Populares del Arte Contemporáneo en México, OMR Gallery, Mexico Federal District
- 1988 Encuentro Nacional de Arte Joven (Aguascalientes, Mexico)
- 1990 Estudio 24, Galería de la Raza (San Francisco, California)
- 1995 Carlomagno, Mexican Consulate (Hamburg, Germany)
- 1996 Enfermo de qué, group exhibition with sculpture group El Mal de Amores
- 2002 De Indians, Parc de la Villette (Paris, France)
Great Masters of Mexican Popular Art from the Collection of Fomento Cultural Banamex, Fine Arts Centre Museum (Chicago, Illinois)
- 2006 Carlomagno Pedro Martínez, Texas Gallery (Houston, Texas)
Carlomagno Pedro Martínez, Boston Arts Academy (Boston, Massachusetts)
- 2007 The Popular Art of Oaxaca in the New Millennium, Gardiner Museum (Toronto, Canada)
- 2008 The Popular Art of Oaxaca in the New Millennium, Friends of Oaxaca Folk Art (New York)
- 2010 Gordas y Flacas, Noel Cayetano Contemporary Art Gallery/ Galería Arte Contemporáneo Noel Cayetano (Oaxaca, Mexico)

SELECTED AWARDS & PUBLICATIONS

- 1986 Gran Premio de Arte Popular in Querétaro, First Place in Sculpture
- 1987 Premio Nacional de La Juventud Presidencia de la República
- 1988 Premio Nacional de la Juventud en Artes Populares
- 1989 US Embassy in Mexico scholarship to study in the United States
- 2014 National Prize for Arts and Sciences of Mexico, in the Popular Arts and Traditions category

Front: Carlomagno Pedro Martinez, *Las Tres Etapas de México (The Three Stages of Mexico)* detail, 2019, Oaxacan black clay and metal, Promised gift of the John Gaston Fairey Estate

This exhibition is generously funded, in part, by the Texas Commission on the Arts, National Endowment for the Arts, the Wesley W. Washburn, M.D. and Lulu L. Smith, M.D. Endowment Fund, the C. Homer and Edith Fuller Chambers Charitable Foundation, the City of Beaumont CVB, and the members of the Art Museum of Southeast Texas. Additional funding provided by Rob Clark and Jerry Thacker.

To find out more about how National Endowment for the Arts grants impact individuals and communities, visit www.arts.gov



Art Museum of Southeast Texas
500 Main Street
Beaumont, Texas 77701
(409) 832-3432 · www.amset.org





COLLECTING A MASTER

COLECCIONANDO LA OBRA DE UN MAESTRO

CARLOMAGNO PEDRO MARTÍNEZ
FROM THE JOHN GASTON FAIREY COLLECTION OF MEXICAN FOLK ART

October 9, 2021 - March 12, 2023

CARLOMAGNO PEDRO MARTÍNEZ: A RACCONTEUR OF METAPHORS IN BLACK CLAY

Carlomagno Pedro Martínez hails from the village of Coyotepec, Oaxaca, Mexico, a Zapotec community in the central valleys of Oaxaca famous for its shiny black pottery. Excavations in the area have yielded objects and evidence that goes back at least 2,500 years. The natural color of the clay is a dull gray, and in order to achieve the characteristic deep black during the firing process, oxygen reduction must take place. The surface is given a particular sheen by painstakingly burnishing the whole surface with an agate or quartz stone.



Carlomagno Pedro Martínez, *Repartición de los Bienes de México* (*Dividing the Spoils of Mexico*) detail, n.d., Oaxacan black clay, Gift of John Gaston Fairey, PC 2017.04.064.1-52

During the early 20th Century, Dr. Atl mentions this type of pottery in his pioneer exhibition and book *Las Artes Populares de México* (*Popular Arts of Mexico*), first published in 1921. In the late 1930s, Paul Van de Velde and Henriette Romeike Van de Velde published “The Black Pottery of Coyotepec, Oaxaca, Mexico” through the Southwest Museum Papers series. In both cases they focus on what most families produced: utilitarian pottery traded through the region, particularly various types of jugs, cántaros for water or to store the strong spirit mescal derived from agave plants and altepexles or mixing bowls.

Dr. Atl comments that there is a limited production of “monos”, anthropomorphic figures that are toys, adding that they are crudely fired, caricaturesque and expressive. Similarly, the Van de Veldes note that the Gomez family stands out as the principal manufacturer of hand built flutes, tiny toys and variously shaped whistles with birds, animals or grotesque human figures, aside from little bells in the form of a woman. They also mention molded jugs with animal heads including owls, monkeys, pigs and even the Virgin of Guadalupe as a recent innovation.

In a twist of events, in the following decades the development of figurative ceramics in Coyotepec –and actually in many pottery villages of Mexico- would become the center-stage for a creative revolution driven by tourism and collectors, including Nelson A. Rockefeller and Alexander Girard. The Pedro Martínez family were to become an important part of this phenomenon, and Carlomagno an exceptional representative, by stretching the limits of the clay. He often refers to an ancient Toltec adage where the master craftsman is someone who not only dominates the craft but also “makes the clay lie” (*hacer mentir al barro*). And that is precisely part of what he has achieved.

The large family, parents and seven siblings would all sit down and work side by side, the younger ones learning by playing and challenging each other. By the late 1950s, their father was to become known for his mermaids and virgins, initially

shaped as mescal bottles, and afterwards as freestanding sculptures. He also was a pioneer doing skulls (1961) and busts of Oaxacan icon Benito Juárez. He became better known in 1972 when he won the best-of-show National Pottery Contest held annually in Tlaquepaque, Jalisco with the effigy of an Aztec inspired Eagle Warrior (Caballero Águila).

By far the most precocious child was Carlomagno. He learned to talk a little over one year of age, was always asking questions, began reading at a very young age, and by eight he had read Don Quijote de la Mancha. His thirst for knowledge was –and still is- boundless, his memory superlative. He listened to his elder’s stories, legends and creation myths. As a teenager he was fortunate to find mentors, such as artist Roberto Donis, who channeled his energy and encouraged him to visit libraries, study art and experiment with clay. Donis founded the Taller de Artes Plásticas Rufino Tamayo (The Rufino Tamayo Fine Arts Workshop) established to nurture the creativity of younger generations and invited Carlomagno to be a part of the first generation, a life changing experience. He read many authors like Octavio Paz; Andrés Henestrosa, a Zapotec-Huave writer who learned Spanish at eighteen years of age and masterfully wrote about the traditions of his people and his own family; Paul Westheim, a German refugee who delved into Aztec thought and art; Carlos Fuentes, and many others.

By the 1980s he started attending the National Youth Art Meetings (Encuentros de Arte Joven) held in the city of Aguascalientes. He began participating, facing great criticism, rebuff and outright rejection, being labeled contemptuously an artesano (artisan or craftsperson) who dared consider himself to be an artist, until renowned Manuel Felguerez came to his defense in 1986 and proclaimed that he should be accepted based on his creativity and craftsmanship. Felguerez himself had developed a line of metal animals and figures in the 1960s as a means to sustain his mother and brothers as he was becoming one of the country’s pioneer abstract artists. In 1992 one of Carlomagno’s pieces was finally selected for acquisition. He has been considered by art critic Jose Alberto Manrique an outstanding representative of the Neo-Mexican art style.

For Carlomagno a major breakthrough was obtaining the National Youth Award in Popular Arts and Culture in 1987 at twenty-two as this gave him the recognition and security to follow his dreams and path. The second recognition was the National Arts and Science Award, also in Popular Arts and Culture in 2014, accompanied by a lifetime monthly stipend.

Where does his genius lie? Creating complex tableaux expressing concepts, stories and legends steeped in history and philosophy through metaphors. One of his obsessions is the personification of death in different circumstances, a constant theme and obsession in broad parts of Mexico. On the one hand

reinterpreting Aztec and Zapotec depictions, such as the tzompantli (skull rack or palisade), an actual practice, or the goddesses personifying death through their skull laden skirts, or the relation of female deities, butterflies and the sun. On the other hand, the personification of myths such as the horned owl whose screech is considered in many Mexican cultures to announce someone’s death. A third grouping of the living portrayed as skeletons in daily activities. He also prominently portrays the nagual, the power of certain humans to transform themselves into animal spirits and out-of-body experiences, among them the lizard who aids farmers with water, the rabbit who illuminates men of power, the pig who plays with black magic and his favorite, the black-dog nagual, a bohemian who loves women and gives them erotic dreams.

So how does Carlomagno define himself at 56 years of age? He says, “I’m a creative entity, self-effaced and not interested in discussions and labels whether I am an artist, a folk artist or an artisan.”

Marta Turok

Curator for the Ruth D. Lechuga Center for Folk Art Studies,
Franz Mayer Museum, Mexico City



Carlomagno Pedro Martínez, *Mazorca de Vida* (*Maize of Life*), n.d., Oaxacan black clay and wire, Promised Gift of the John Gaston Fairey Estate