HABLAMOS JUNTOS together we speak

From the Unnumbered Portrait series, lino-cut on reclaimed produce box, 16" x 12" x 5" (each) 2016-2018

NARSISO MARTINEZ

Contemporary Latinx Broadsides Project

Museo Eduardo Carrillo & Young Writers Program

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Philosophy in the Field, ink and charcoal on discarded produce box, 6' x 9' 2016

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Sunday Morning, acrylic, gouache, and charcoal on recycled asparagus boxes, detail 2018

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Narsiso C Martinez

I was born in Oaxaca, Mexico and I came to the United States when I was 21 years old. I currently live in Long Beach, California. I attended Evans Community Adult School and completed high school in 2006 at the age of 29. I earned an Associate of Arts in 2009 from Los Angeles City College. In fall of 2012, I graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from California State University Long Beach, and in 2018 I earned a Master of Fine Arts from the same institution. My work is about farm workers, and it has been exhibited in California at the CSULB University Art Museum (2012, 2015, and 2017), Angels Gate Cultural Center in San Pedro, Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery in Los Angeles, Torrance Art Museum in Torrance, National Immigration Law Center in Los Angles, Whittier Historical Museum in Whittier, Ralston Family Learning Center at the Long Beach Museum of Art as part of the Artist in Residence program, and currently at the Mexican Center for Culture and Cinematic Arts at the Mexican Consulate in Los Angeles and at LBMAx, in Long Beach

Let's get personal. Tell us about your artwork and the importance of Latino/a artists as role-models. What education and skills are needed for an art career*?*

- **My cultural heritage is…**Oaxacan
- **I was encouraged by or mentored by…** I was encouraged by family and friends, and my Mentors include Professors from Evens Community Adult School, Los Angeles City College, Michael Nannery from the advicing center at CSULB, and Professors Jen Grey, Ju Yi, Roxanne Sexauer, Marie Thibeault, Fran Siegel, and Catha Paquette from California State University Long Beach.
- **My education/training included…** I received an Associate of Arts in Art from Los Angeles City College, Bachelor of Fine Arts, and a Master of Fine Arts from California State University Long Beach.
- **What were/are your major influences?** Paintings of Dutch artist Vincent van Gogh, French painter Jean-Francois Millet, and Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros.
- **How old were you when you started your artwork? I knew I was an artist when ….** I would do portraits of my neighbors when I was like 11 or 12 years old. (I didn't know I was an artist) When I went to art school, I wanted to better my skills at drawing and painting to paint like the artists I liked. I was 34 years old (during my last year of undergrad) when I

realized I wanted to do the kind of artwork I'm presently doing, artwork that relates to my community.

- **What was the reason you started creating art? I turned to art when I felt…** I started drawing because I liked the mark making process. Through it, I like representing something I am experiencing either visually, or emotionally. The dramatic experience that made my art have even more meaning to me was … When I started to be more conceptual. Technical skills become secondary, and I started to focus more in the message I was trying to bring to the viewers.
- **I would tell young artists…** to never give up on their ideas, it doesn't matter how silly it might sound. Art is a process of elimination in any media. Find an idea then execute it. If you are not happy with the results, find another idea and execute it, and so on. If an idea happens to be a good one, make the most out of it, then find another idea and execute it.

What leadership skill have the arts cultivated in you? Through my work, I feel I have developed the ability to inspire.

When did you make your first sale of your artwork?

The first sale I won't forget is Banana Lady. This piece is one of the first experiments I did with produce cardboard boxes. It depicts a woman carrying on her back a big bunch of bananas. It was purchased for $3,000 by The National Immigration Law Center in Los Angeles.

Looking at the broader picture, can you help students understand how you developed in the areas of visual literacy, critical thinking, and creativity? Your story will inspire them.

- **Describe your art medium. I use this medium because ….** The medium I use relates to the subject matter of the piece. For example, I only use black ink washes, charcoal, and little white. This is to create a rather somber quality throughout the piece. I am trying to represent the harshness of the situations I experienced while working in the fields. I use produce cardboard boxes as support. This creates a second layer of meaning. Once, these boxes contained the products picked by the farmworkers represented on them.
- **I made this piece by (process)…** 1) I first put the boxes together, I stapled them, then turned the whole around, and used brown paper packing tape to stabilize it more. I used vine charcoal to sketch out the whole composition. With ink washes, I separated the darks and lights to create mood throughout the piece. Next, I used compressed charcoal in the real dark areas of the composition. Finally, I used charcoal pencils to add detail in certain desired areas. 2) I transferred the image on a piece of linoleum first. Next, I carved the images, using special printmaking tools according to

light and shade. Then, I inked the plate and placed it on the unfolded produce box. Finally, I run them through the press. The final product was seen after the image was dry and the box folded back.

What is the intent of the work?
1) Philosophy in the Fields represents passages of my own experiences in the fields and the encouragement of discussion among my coworkers. I feel it is important to be aware of our situations as farmworkers, such as working conditions and wages. How can we better that? Is it up to us? Is it up to the future generations? As someone who was able to go to college, I encourage my coworkers to encourage their kids to go to college.

2) These lino-cut prints are about the preconceived notions of the masked and/or hooded individuals in American society; they are usually portrayed negatively in our popular culture. However, my experiences as a farm worker has thought me the irony of this situation. In reality, the majority of the farm workers tend to work masked and/or hooded to protect themselves from biocides residues and the harsh weather conditions in the fields.
Terrorists, activists, and thieves were some of the adjectives used by some viewers to described these prints when first presented on regular printmaking paper. As a result, I contextualized the portraits by printing them on boxes that once contained fruits and vegetables more likely picked by the masked and/or hooded migrant field hands.

How is your art a way to tell your story? If the piece is interesting enough (compositionally and the way it is executed), the viewer might ask questions and perhaps arrive at her or his on story. Or, the viewer might be more interesting in the executer and the actual intentions behind the piece, that's when I would tell my story (verbally).

Your artwork creates a dialogue with the student as he/she relates to and interacts with your work. How could a viewer look more closely at the details of your work? There is so much going on in my work, and this piece is not the exception. One can look more closely to the piece by asking questions.

How could he/she be more intimately involved with your artwork? When the viewer asks questions about the piece, she or he might not find answers. This might trigger curiosity that could lead to research, either by doing some reading, or by asking questions to the artist. The more the viewer knows and understands about the piece, the closer they become.

What would you like them to experience and notice? (You might consider hidden clues, seeing something unexpected, connections between facts and feelings, art and life, or how they might be inspired to create their own stories and artworks.)

It might be a little too hard for the viewer to understand that this piece (Philosophy in the Fields) it's about my personal story. The clue to see this is in the title, Philosophy In The Fields. The word "philosophy" implies something academic. When I produced this piece, I was perhps the only one from my coworkers who was going to college to get an MFA. Also, most of the characters in this piece are depicted doing some king of labor common in the fields. These actions represent the actions I perform while working in the fields.

What (unique) skills have you developed as an artist? While there is still room for improvement, I feel like I am so much confident with my speech, and speaking skills, not only with the language itself, but also when it comes to talk about my own art work.

How do you think art impacts our culture? By triggering conversations about important issues, such as immigration, labor opportunities, education, or social inequity in our communities.