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Río Hondo College Students Celebrate Culture, Create Día de Los Muertos Altar

WHITTIER – Río Hondo College students are delivering vibrant expressions of Chicano/a and Latino/x culture through their work on a Día de Los Muertos altar, which is on display at the Self Help Graphics & Art exhibition in Los Angeles, ‘Everything Connected: *Land, Body, Cosmos.*’

The exhibition, which runs through Nov. 24, is part of an ongoing partnership between Río Hondo College Arts and Cultural Programs and Self Help Graphics & Art – a community arts center that encourages and promotes Chicano/a and Latino/x artists.

Río Hondo students Art Aguilar, Meliza Lopez, Emily Lopez and Esbeidy Nuñez created the altar to acknowledge the meaning of Día de Los Muertos, or Day of the Dead – a celebration associated with the joyful observance of death and life. The altar was created under the direction of master altaristas Ofelia Esparza and Rosanna Esparza Ahrens, and Río Hondo College’s Assistant Professor of Photography Miyo Stevens-Gandara.

Stevens-Gandara, who was also selected as the commemorative print artist and curator of the event, said the Día de Los Muertos theme was chosen to celebrate the intersection of art and culture for the student artists.

“Día de Los Muertos gives our community a chance to remember our ancestors and loved ones together,” Stevens-Gandara said. “It’s an opportunity for students to proudly celebrate their heritage, family traditions and cultural practices, but it’s also a time to reflect and share memories and experiences together, regardless of cultural background.”

The art piece displays a dinner table, decorated with symbolism to show each artist’s view into Chicano/a and Latino/x culture – including symbols for fertility, rebirth, pain, feminism, inclusivity, family and togetherness.

“It feels nice to see people admiring my work,” Nuñez said. “During the exhibition opening, I saw two guests looking at the altar and they specifically complimented my portion.”

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Río Hondo College is an educational and community partner committed to advancing social justice and equity as an antiracist institution that collectively invests in all students’ academic and career pathways that lead to attainment of degree, certificate, transfer, and lifelong-learning goals. For information on the College or its programs, please call 562-692-0921 or visit www.riohondo.edu.

Esparza and Esparza Ahrens said it was a joy to work with the students and see a new generation of artists collaborate, flex their creativity and build something that can speak to many people.

Beyond the altar, the exhibition offers guests a blend of visual and performance art to accentuate the feeling, sights and sounds of Día de Los Muertos.

“This partnership that Río Hondo College has with Self Help Graphics & Art is phenomenal and we are truly proud of the work by our students and professors to make this Día de Los Muertos exhibition a reality,” Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss said. “We’re proud that our College is teeming with cultural diversity and creativity, and this exhibition is just a small taste of the imagination of our students and community.”

Guests can visit the exhibition at Self Help Graphics & Art, located at 1300 East 1st St. in Los Angeles. Appointments can be made [here](#).

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

ART1: (Left to Right) Master altaristas Rosanna Esparza Ahrens and Ofelia Esparza showcase the Día de los Muertos altar they supervised with Río Hondo College students Meliza Lopez and Esbeidy Nuñez. (Not pictured: Art Aguilar and Emily Lopez, the other two students who helped create the altar.)

ART2: Río Hondo College students Meliza Lopez (left) and Esbeidy Nuñez (right) with Río Hondo College’s Assistant Professor of Photography Miyo Stevens-Gandara (center) at the Self Help Graphics & Art center in Los Angeles. Lopez and Nuñez, along with Art Aguilar and Emily Lopez, created a Día de los Muertos altar as a centerpiece at the art exhibition ‘Everything Connected: *Land, Body, Cosmos.*’ Stevens-Gandara was selected as the commemorative print artist and curator of the event.

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