

Art from the inside

Paño Drawings by Chicano Prisoners

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Preface

"The sea and its sands weep what I suffer; the pen weeps as it writes black tears of sorrow." (*Las décimas de don Mateo*)

A letter arrives in a Chicano woman's mailbox. Sent by her husband who is serving time in a San Antonio jail, the envelope is decorated with a fine pen and ink drawing of the proud but sorrowful face of a Chicano man wearing a *moco* rag tied around his forehead and clown makeup under his eyes. The bandana identifies the man as a gang member, and the clown's makeup is a sign that he is masking his feelings. Framing his face are prison and religious symbols - a watchtower, a chain link fence, barbed wire, and a wooden cross. Together these images hint at the envelope's contents and the emotions that the inmate wishes to share with his spouse.

The woman opens the envelope and finds a neatly folded cotton handkerchief instead of a letter written on paper. Unfolding it, she discovers a ballpoint pen drawing expressing her husband's sadness about his imprisonment and separation from his family and friends. Not only does this pocket-sized canvas represent his personal thoughts from prison, it also elicits specific emotions from his wife about memories of the love they shared before he was incarcerated.

When words fail or are beyond reach, the visual language of paño art can convey stories and emotions that are understood by those who create and receive them. Chicano inmate-artists emphasize image and symbolism over literary communication. The expressive power of their imagery breaks through the prison walls and links the inside with the outside.

Origins

Although the origin of paño drawings is unknown, the art form probably emerged from jails and prisons in Texas, New Mexico and California during the *pachuco* -zootsuiter - movement of the 1940's when Chicano identity first crystallized. Throughout the 1950's and 1960's convicts risked punishment to tear up their pillowcases and sheets and make drawings on them with fountain pens that portrayed their experiences and expressed their feelings of doing jail time. Fountain pens were difficult to use because their points ripped the fabric, and consequently few of these early works have survived. By the 1970's prison commissaries stocked ballpoint pens and large white handkerchiefs with woven borders. Unfortunately the ballpoint pens penetrated the loose weave of these handkerchiefs and made the cotton canvases difficult to handle. In the late 1980's prison authorities allowed commissaries to sell smaller, more tightly woven handkerchiefs that were far easier to draw on. In the hands of the paño makers, these handkerchiefs became miniature canvases.

Sources

Paño makers in jail live in a world of limited visual inspiration. Some are inspired by the tattooed designs on their own bodies and those of other inmates. Most appropriate images from printed sources: lowrider, tattoo, soap opera and sex magazines; newspapers; calendars, posters and popular illustrations of religious figures, Mexican heroes and martyrs; comic and coloring books; and movie and burlesque posters. Each artist selects and preserves favorite illustrations in a file of personal images called *copias* that he will modify over time as his tastes change.

Copias are sometimes owned by specific prisoners. They are valued as commercial property because their owners can barter the right to use their *copias* with other inmate-artists or lend them with no strings attached. When a paño maker is released from prison, he either gives his *copias* to another inmate-artist for safekeeping, or he lets them be used by anyone who wants them.

Paño making

The easiest paño to make is a colored piece. The artist selects an image from his *copias* and traces it onto a sheet of paper. After deciding which colors to use, he fills in the study's outlines by shading it with ballpoint pens, colored pencils or felt tip markers. The technique is similar to tattooing. Next he adjusts the scale with the aid of a hand-drawn grid. Once the drawing has been transferred onto the handkerchief, he repeats the process of filling in the outlines with color and shading.

To create a complex black and white paño an artist must exercise a much higher level of skill and visual organization. Again using a technique similar to tattooing, an artist composes a montage by transferring multiple *copias* onto the handkerchief. He juxtaposes images in varying sizes, all relating aesthetically and symbolically to a central image. The artist usually leaves the background ink-free to reveal the white color of the handkerchief. However, he sometimes uses *sobra*, a technique of stippling, shading or inking for dramatic effect that many inmate-artists admire but few master.

Other canvases

Although most Chicano prison drawings are made on handkerchiefs, inmate-artists draw on almost anything that they can find, including nylon commissary bags used for storage and laundry and envelopes purchased in the prison store. Despite the different formats, the style of drawing is the same as the handkerchiefs. However, the purpose of decorating a bag is to identify its owner and to prevent thieves from stealing it. Hand-decorated envelopes in color or black and white are used to mail letters and paños. The demand for them can provide a profitable business for a convict who is skilled in drawing. Popular designs include landscapes with sunsets, kissing swans, hearts and flowers, and prison subjects. An inmate-artist can make about six envelopes a week. In the prison barter system, two envelopes are worth a pack of cigarettes.

Themes

San Antonio's paño artists draw on a rich visual vocabulary of Mexican and American culture - high and low. Their work blends barrio art, like tattoo flashes, lowrider detailing, murals and graffiti; representations of Christian religious figures and Mexican heroes; and symbolic references to the prison experience of *tirando tiempo* - doing time. Paño makers generally use black ink for drawings that portray *la vida loca* - the crazy life of drugs and alcohol, gambling, prostitution and other crimes - and *viajes* - dreams, fantasies, nightmares, and drug trips. Colored pencils are usually reserved for religious, family and romantic subjects. Paño artists frequently use these images in iconic ways that are reminiscent of the narrative religious art of Mexico's Catholic painting and sculpture and the Pre-Hispanic pictorial writing traditions of Aztec and Mixtec manuscripts. Similarly, when reading some paños, the story unfolds from right to left. Paños also relate to the popular religious paintings on tin called *ex votos* that record miraculous events in the patron's life. Although paños sometimes include English or Spanish phrases, visual images usually convey their meaning.

Many paños have evocative elements woven into their compositions. Symbols of time and its passing are frequently represented. Clocks, hourglasses, calendar pages, tombstones, and numbered book pages all convey the relentless passing of time and the boredom of prison existence. Chicanos' pride in, and identification with earlier times is evoked by figures of a romanticized Mexican past, including Aztec warriors, Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata, and images of 1940's Texan *pachucos* and their antique lowriders. Images of the Virgin of Guadalupe and Jesus Christ copied from religious books and postcards and associated themes of suffering, redemption, and prayer are important in paño art. Love in all its aspects - familial, romantic, and sexual - are expressed symbolically with cartoons, hearts, ribbons, flowers and birds, or with explicit images derived from sex magazines and pornography. Illustrations of *la vida loca* are juxtaposed with prison symbols that include brick walls, bars, chain link fences, barbed wire, and watchtowers, as well as vignettes of cellblock life.

By using a rich inventory of images and combining them in graphically powerful ways, paño artists create windows onto their experiences, thoughts and feelings. The ability to tell both simple and complex stories that have meaning to both those in prison and those on the outside sets paños apart from other forms of prison art.

Mexican heritage and chicano identity

In the aftermath of the Spanish conquest of Mexico, Pre-Hispanic religion blended with Spanish Catholicism and enhanced Mexico's narrative and visual traditions. On the political front, multiple incursions and foreign rule altered the borders between Mexico and the United States. People living on both sides of the border developed particular cultural traditions centered on ranching with its own set of heroes and symbols.

Drawing upon their knowledge of history when making paños with Mexican or border themes, inmate-artists are able to share their beliefs and traditions with other inmates. Thus, prison becomes a school for the transmission of Chicano culture. *Copias* include scenes of Aztec nobles and maidens in architectural settings taken from Pre-Hispanic history and legends. An eagle standing on a cactus with a snake in its beak is the ancient symbol of the Aztec capitol of Tenochtitlan, the final resting place at the end of the Aztecs' migration out of Aztlán, their legendary homeland. Today it is Mexico's national symbol. The eagle and the snake, as well as the sun, symbolize Mexico in paño iconography, but along with the letters MM and the number 13, they may also represent the Mexican Mafia. Because of its gang connotations, Texas has outlawed some of this imagery. The Virgin of Guadalupe, patron saint of Mexico, symbolizes protection and Mexican identity, and she often appears in paños as a reassuring presence.

When depicting the heroes of the Mexican Revolution, the paño maker's source may be old *corridos* – narrative ballads celebrating the outlaw heroes of the border wars. Liberation figures, like Pancho Villa brandishing a sword or Emiliano Zapata wearing a *bandolera* – pistol belt - across his chest, are usually surrounded by images of the Alamo and beautiful *charras* – ranch women - who wear traditional sombreros with wide brims. While Mexican national symbols generally refer to an idealized past, border motifs are more often associated with reclaiming land, liberty, and dignity for the Mexican people. Chicanos' identification with their roots and culture is a profound source of pride and an affirmation of their heritage.

Chicanos are prisoners of their dual Mexican and American nationalities, yet they are alienated from both. Culturally, they are suspended between a motherland that they vaguely remember and a homeland that relegates them to society's margins. At the core of Chicano identity is *La Raza*, their shared ancestral experience of Mexico. In paño art, the search for identity and *La Raza* is expressed most often in *viajes*, drawings that frequently portray Aztec warriors, Mexican Revolutionary heroes and *charras*. Artists usually frame them with peacocks, symbolizing pride and beauty, and roses, symbolizing passion and hope, designs that have similar meanings in both tattoo and paño art and are clearly statements of Chicano pride.

Lowriders, pickups and chicano pride

The lowrider is the most unique, flamboyant and enduring expression of Chicano pride and identity. These customized cars originated as an expression of *pachuco* style in the 1940's when Chicanos struggled against discrimination and poverty. In an era when ethnic minorities were expected to conform to Anglo dress code, *pachucos*, much like today's hip-hop aficionados, defied the status quo by wearing zootsuits with baggy high-waisted trousers, oversized coats, wide-brimmed hats, long gold watch chains and droopy moustaches. *Pachucos* customized cast-off cars, called *bombas*, by chopping, lowering and dropping the frames **so they** hovered inches from the ground.

The automobile became a canvas for the expressions of its owner's dreams and fantasies. Cruising the boulevards "low and slow" while listening to their favorite tunes on the radio, *pachucos* in their lowriders embodied Chicano pride and ethnic defiance. Today lowrider culture is a worldwide phenomenon, but it is still "a uniquely expressive medium for Chicanos' continuing efforts to carve out a new kind of American identity while resisting assimilation."

Jesus Christ

Spanish Catholicism found fertile ground in New World Indians' love of ceremony and pageantry; the veneration of different aspects of gods; and the emphasis on pain and suffering as integral parts of religious life. Indigenous peoples, whose Pre-Hispanic religion included human sacrifice and ritual bloodletting, readily embraced the Spanish conquerors'

Christian concept of a crucified Savior with bleeding wounds, a sacrificial death of terrible suffering, and a triumphant resurrection. Most Mexican rural people and their Mexican-American relatives still hold to traditional Catholic beliefs.

Paños depicting Jesus Christ and other religious figures are most commonly made for mothers, grandmothers and aunts and include messages asking for spiritual guidance and protection for the artists' families. Images of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary and the saints have a central position on the home altar. Family members pray to these religious figures to help them during crisis and to solve everyday problems.

Paño artists portray Jesus Christ in many forms. Favorite compositions include Jesus praying in Gethsemane, Christ wearing the crown of thorns, and the Crucifixion. Whichever composition they choose, Christ always symbolizes faith, hope, suffering and salvation.

The virgin of guadalupe

In 1531 Juan Diego, a Mexican Indian peasant, had a vision of the Virgin Mary at Tepeyac, a hill outside Mexico City and the original site of the shrine of Tonantzín, the Aztec Mother Goddess. Unlike the Spanish conquerors' icons, Juan Diego's Virgin was dark-skinned and dressed in traditional Indian costume. She told him that she wanted a temple built in her honor.

To prove to the bishop that Juan Diego's vision was real, the Virgin told him to gather roses blooming in winter from the rocks and wrap them in his cape. When he opened his cape to show the bishop the roses he had gathered, an image of the dark Virgin was revealed and the bishop was convinced of the truth of the vision. The Virgin's demand that a temple in her honor be built in Tepeyac was fulfilled by the construction of the shrine of Guadalupe, a pilgrimage church that thousands of devotees visit every year. Few realize that the shrine is built in the same place that the ancient Mexican Mother Goddess who ruled earth, fertility and sky was worshipped for centuries. Two hundred years after Juan Diego's vision, the Virgin of Guadalupe was declared the patron saint of Mexico.

This Virgin played a critical role in converting Mexico's native people to Christianity. Miguel Cabrera, one of Mexico's most renowned 18th century Baroque artists, painted her official portrait under church supervision and recorded the official details of Juan Diego's vision on his canvas. Cabrera's Virgin has been repeated in many formats since his original work, and frequently appears in slightly modified forms in paño art. Cabrera painted the Virgin larger than the sun radiating behind her and standing upon a crescent moon. The primary placement of the Virgin and the secondary positions of the celestial bodies show that her power is greater than the discredited Aztec gods. The designs on her robes include stars and roses that indicate her heavenly and earthly natures. Her hands held in prayer suggest her close relationship to the Almighty and emphasizes her role as an intermediary between human beings and God.

Today La Guadalupana is a living presence and an object of great devotion for Mexicans everywhere. As the Mother of God, she is sacred and associated with motherhood. She protects and comforts all living things. Her representation is found everywhere, even in local stores beside cash registers and on the dashboards of cars. More than any other Christian icon, she is the one who is asked to intercede on behalf of the family. People pray to her for strength and protection from evil. It is not unusual for Chicano men to wear tattoos of the Virgin of Guadalupe like body armor to protect them from harm.

Family

The family is the inspiration and source of much of San Antonio's Chicano folk art production. The rich variety of furniture, sculptures, textiles, religious and paper arts found in their homes creates an atmosphere of emotional closeness and gives visual cues to the social benefits of belonging to the family.

Paños are displayed on the *altar casero* - home altar -, a place in a room especially dedicated to worship and created and maintained by an older woman in the household. Along with prison art and religious icons, she

may place candles, lights and Christmas decorations; family photos and pictures of popular heroes; diplomas, military medals, travel souvenirs, and other personal mementos. The *altar casero* is an expression of the woman's personal aesthetic and her attempt to influence supernatural forces.

Displayed at home alongside paños, are gifts of embroidered cloth given by a mother to her daughter or embroidered handkerchiefs with designs of hearts, flowers and ribbons with special messages from wife to husband. Paño makers sometime use designs that recall the embroideries they remember from home in the drawings that they send to their mothers, wives and children.

The family may frame his paños, discuss his artistic talent and proudly show his drawings to guests. Their affection for him can be measured by the care with which his paños are displayed at home. A mother can intuit her son's physical, mental and emotional health from the paños he sends her.

Giving paños to family members is a way for a convict to avoid being forgotten by them while he is doing time, especially if his sentence is long, and to reciprocate for gifts that they have sent him during his confinement. Paños provide a way for him to celebrate holidays and special occasions with his loved ones. If he has children, he may send them colorful drawings of funny cartoons and popular characters to make them laugh. He may painstakingly copy a message from a greeting card onto a paño with colored pencils to express love for his mother or wife. In many ways, gifts of paños can sustain the bonds of love and loyalty between inmates and their relatives on the outside.

Cartoon love

When a convict wants to send an affectionate message to his girlfriend or wife, perhaps to court her or to make up for a lover's quarrel, instead of sending her flowers, he may draw a cute cartoon to make her smile and forgive him. It may be a sexy rendition of Minnie Mouse or Betty Boop or perhaps a cartoon couple dressed up in barrio style. If the couple breaks up, she will dispose of his paño.

Whether or not the inmate is actually an artist, cartoon paños are so easy to make that they are a way for an amateur artist to develop his skills. He learns by tracing *copias*,

and after making a few paños, he may begin to receive commissions. His skills as a tradesman will develop through the challenge of executing his commissioned work. Eventually he will graduate from cartoons to black and white paños and be recognized as an artist.

The one I love

Once sentenced to prison, an inmate's physical intimacy with the woman he loves is limited by the jail's rules governing visiting hours. The couple is allowed to kiss when the visitor arrives and again when they part. They may hold hands for forty-five minutes above a Plexiglas barrier while guards watch them. At best the experience is awkward, without privacy and certainly no substitute for intimacy.

Given these limitations on their social interactions, it is not surprising that paño makers create black and white drawings of romantic and erotic fantasies for themselves and fellow prisoners. Inspiration comes from adult magazines like **Gallery**, with its risqué home photos of "girls next door", and from images of couples passionately kissing on the covers of Mexican romance comic books. Artists often frame the women and embracing couples with emblems of love and romance such as love birds or cockatoos, symbolizing courtship, building a family, and companionship; roses, representing love and passion; *charras* suggesting Mexican and border culture; or macho images of a man beside a beautiful girl driving into the sunset.

Such imagery expresses an inmate's loneliness at being separated from his life and relationships outside the prison walls and longing for women's emotional companionship. The hope that love's flame still burns in a lover's heart and the simple yearning to embrace the sweet memories of good times past are often recorded in paño art. Furthermore, paños depicting broken hearts or crying women can capture a prisoner's pain and help him cope with rejection and loss.

Valentines

Paño valentines expressing romantic love are sent as gifts to celebrate a wife or lover's anniversary, birthday and other special occasions. Hearts, kissing swans, butterflies, flowers, and written dedications convey his love and devotion.

The symbolism and the sources of these *copias* are found in older tattoo flashes. Not only is the imagery and meaning similar, in fact, the technique of making these kinds of paños is very similar to tattooing. A tattoo artist creates a stencil from a flash, transfers it onto the skin and then fills in the line drawing with ink shading. Freehand drawing is rarely done. In the same manner, a paño artist traces a line drawing from a *copía*, transfers it onto a handkerchief, and then fills it in with shading.

Tattooing is the most admired and widespread art form in prison. It has flourished behind prison bars despite centuries of bans; its imagery has been passed down to generations of inmates. Tattooing survives, perhaps, because it is an art of rebellion and an expression of individuality that becomes essential when imprisonment means the loss of identity.

La vida loca

La vida loca, the crazy life of the street with its lure of sex, gambling, drugs, alcohol, and crime, is a seductive lifestyle of thrills, pleasure and instant gratification. Unfortunately, many who live it end up imprisoned, beginning a cycle of addiction and incarceration that is a direct consequence.

La vida loca is the life of an outsider who is not living a normal existence. He lives on the edge of society following other rules. The origins of the outsider in *tejano* culture can be found in the old *corridos* that celebrated the outlaw heroes of the border wars, who were usually tequila smugglers, train robbers and illegal aliens looking for work. The famous lyric, "defending one's right with his pistol in his hand" was an outcry against the injustice these men fought against. But for some young men, that cry for dignity and self-respect became fused with the notoriety of drug dealers and other criminals.

Paño artists who record *la vida loca* always include in their work the consequences of the lifestyle with images of what has been lost by those who lead it. In Paul Nuñez's paño, *La Vida Loca*, a contemporary gang member is portrayed as a border outlaw with a smoking revolver in his hand. The meaning is reinforced by the Mexican flag behind the outlaw and by the beautiful woman protected by an eagle beside him. A U.S. flag symbolizes oppression and prison bars symbolize the loss of freedom resulting from *la vida loca*. In effect, these compositions are cautionary tales, warning *vatos* – Chicano youths – about the dangers of street life.

Party girls

Paños of *la vida loca* often depict women as whores juxtaposed with *copias* of a magician or a serpent, both symbols of temptation. Identified by their large breasts and protruding buttocks, barely covered in see-through lingerie and stockings, they pose as dominatrixes and submissives, or engage in sexual acts. Portraying one's girlfriend in this manner is forbidden, but the anonymous women of pornography are acceptable models. Inmates lift *copias*, called hot dog or skin flicks, from sex magazines and embellish them. These drawings can be very explicit and the theme is always sexual fantasy. They provide convicts with female erotic images, a welcome diversion from the all male environment of prison.

Camaradas

San Antonio is one of the poorest cities in the United States. Poverty, discrimination and social pathology are rampant leading some young *vatos* – guys – to express their frustration and rage in criminal activities and street violence. Gang membership captures their imagination and desire to belong to a group in ways that school and society do not. The gang functions like a second family providing identity, structure, emotional support, and respect. Peer pressure sometimes leaves *vatos* with little choice but to pursue gang membership. *Camarada* – gang – philosophy can be summed up as 'they do for me, I do for them'. Whether on the street or in paños, *camaradas* can be identified by their gestures, style of dress, particularly their headgear – gangster hats, bandanas, knit caps and baseball caps with the brims turned up – and by their tattoos of gang affiliations, nicknames, barrios, religious icons, and cartoons.

Although social gangs are brought together by a common interest like lowriders, the gangs of *la vida loca* are violent. Organized like a corporation whose main business is drug dealing, the violent gangs also engage in prostitution and extortion. They use violence and weapons to expand their power into new territory, protect their home turf and preserve their status. Many members are incarcerated for their actions and in jail the gang cycle begins anew where membership in a prison gang of *carnales* – brothers – becomes crucial for protection and survival.

Drug life

The destructive and chaotic underside of *la vida loca* is drug abuse. Although using drugs is considered a weakness in Chicano culture, *vatos* are especially vulnerable to drugs because of social stress, gang pressures and the traditional prohibitions about expressions of pain. Some use heroin or other intoxicants to dull painful feelings and quiet their anxiety and then become addicted and commit violent crimes to support their drug habits. During incarceration they continue abusing drugs to escape the even harsher realities of prison life.

Vatos are not proud of these activities, so scenes of drug use in *la vida loca* and *viaje*

paños are usually hidden from the outside world. They are made for an inner circle of *carnales*, and out of respect, are not shown to women. Many symbols of drug use can be found in paño drawings: dragons, 8 balls, marijuana leaves, pills, mushrooms, spoons, syringes (drugs and paraphernalia); snakes (temptation); melting clocks and faces (effect of drugs); spider webs (addiction); and skulls (death). The artist often balances a central scene of drug use with images showing the pain associated with addiction and the devastating impact drugs have on families and lives.

Crime scenes

Paños often feature narratives of real or imagined crimes – street and bar fights, drug dealing, armed robbery, hostage taking, stabbings, shootings and murder. Sometimes the inmate-artists add small realistic details about the chase and arrest, like roadblocks, police beatings and handcuffing, sentencing, and jailhouse scenes of beat downs and other brutal acts committed by correction officers. However, without detailed investigation, it is impossible to know whether the acts portrayed actually occurred. Convicts tend to fantasize and exaggerate stories about torture, murder, suicide and other exploits, and paño artists record and embellish these stories for dramatic effect.

Sometimes in rehabilitation sessions, inmates are encouraged to create imaginary violent scenes of drug abuse and murder but they do them unwillingly, often to curry favor with the rehabilitation staff or prison authorities. In the past, some Texas correction institutions allowed these paños to be marketed through the system's art programs where there is a large appetite for violent images from a voyeuristic audience outside the prison walls. These commercial productions may reflect pride in craftsmanship but the affection for small details that traditional paños exhibit is missing. Marketplace imagery is chosen to catch the eye with appealing designs instead of personal emotional expression. Thus, the market subtly shapes the themes recorded on paños reflected by the artists' different choices of images and compositions from the paños that they send home to their families.

Cellbound

The United States has one of the highest incarceration rates in the world. Since the collapse of the oil business in the late 1980's, the number of prisons in Texas has increased more than sevenfold from 20 to 150. Although private prisons have become profitable businesses in many states, the governor is ultimately in control of the prison system and sets the tone for the wardens. Wardens run each facility like private fiefdoms and enforce their own sets of rules. However, it is the governor who encourages or forbids art programs and the flow of art supplies in jail and creates a supportive or hostile environment for the making of paños.

The war on crime and the privatization of prison facilities have meant that prisoners are serving longer sentences under harsher conditions than in previous decades. Dehumanization is the trend in prison governance, and the system suppresses an individual's identity in many ways. Inmates

are identified by number. They are forced to conform to a standardized dress code, perform menial work and accept rigid schedules. They eat the same food, endure lockup in a small space, experience lengthy periods of inactivity, and receive brief periods of exercise and release. Convicts also endure enforced celibacy during their sentences. Prisoners are under constant supervision and surveillance, even when they are in solitary confinement. Human contact is limited to the wardens, correction officers, other convicts and occasional visitors. It is difficult to sustain friendships because prisoners are constantly moved around within the system without notice. The lack of privacy, constant noise, ugliness, monotony, threat of rape and violence causes overwhelming feelings of rage, fear, futility, boredom and depression. To escape such nightmarish conditions, inmates turn to games, fantasy, drugs, and suicide.

To survive in prison a convict must be physically, emotionally and spiritually strong. Hardness, anger and violence are encouraged; friendliness, gentleness and sadness must be hidden for fear that others will find an inmate weak. Projecting a tough, hard face is a requirement for survival in prison; masking emotions and hiding feelings are also necessities.

Variations on the mask theme appear frequently in paño art. Mocking jesters or a pair of silly clowns may imply foolish behavior, while a pair of sinister clowns may suggest false pretenses or worse. Comedic and tragic masks are sometimes paired with the phrase, "Smile Now, Cry Later", a fatalistic concept that good times will inevitably be followed by a period of troubles. However the masks are portrayed, the message is clear – the world is a chaotic place where appearances are deceiving and where feelings and true emotions are best masked from view.

Artists in residence

Art is one of the best defenses an inmate has to cope with prison's dehumanization.

The grim reality is that a prisoner is stripped of everything that matters in his life except time. How he handles that reality is the key to how he survives incarceration. Prison routine is less depressing if he can find an activity that will make time pass more quickly and interestingly. Art's liberating fantasies not only allow an inmate-artist to mentally escape from his cell and wander the world of his imagination, it provides spiritual nourishment for his soul. It is an outlet for the expression of the pent-up emotions he has hidden from others in order to survive in such a hostile environment.

Chicano prisoners live by rules of conduct (pride, respect, patience, and heart) to insure that their interactions with other inmates are peaceful and to help them survive their prison sentences with some semblance of dignity. When they apply the same qualities to paño making, prison becomes a school for developing new skills and learning about their culture. In prison, they pass on art traditions and techniques through a system of apprenticeship to other inmate-artists. This training accounts for the repetition of images, symbols, motifs and styles in paño art. An inmate-artist earns *respeto* – respect – from his fellow inmates through paño making. He needs *paciencia* – patience – and discipline to draw with concentration and not make a mistake that could ruin his work. He feels *orgullo* – pride – from his artistic accomplishment and from his knowledge of his Chicano background. He feels *corazon* – heart – when he pours his emotions and passions into his paño's images. By practicing these qualities in art production, the inmate-artist's character is strengthened in ways that are crucial to his spiritual and practical survival.

The code of respect applies when judging or criticizing paño art. An inmate respects any paño drawing and never comments or even touches an artwork unless the artist asks him to. Unlike the practice of the outside art world, it is not polite to criticize or judge a work of art. If there are elements of gang imagery in the paño, they must remain secret and can never be discussed. Craftsmanship, especially shading techniques, is admired, but ultimately a paño is appreciated for how successfully the artist communicated *corazon*. Paño artists earn respect in prison by sharing their knowledge. If they are talented, they enjoy an elevated status. They are able to trade their art for goods and services insuring their practical survival. They are given cigarettes, food and drugs, telephone privileges and friendship. They also

enjoy some protection against rape and beatings. There is pressure on artists to perform. They take pride in doing better work, and the chance to barter for goods and privileges may increase its quality and output. There is a sense of barrio cohesiveness, that “if you slack off, you will bring the others down with you.”

It is not always possible to identify the true creator of a paño because of how it originated. Some artwork was commissioned and the patron's signature was added instead of the inmate-artist's. A commissioned paño is really about the patron's feelings rather than the artist's. It is like a greeting card where the sender signs his name rather than the card's creator. Sometimes paños are forged or stolen and the new owner attaches his name and quickly sends it out of prison. One deterrent to theft is to integrate a signature into a section of the picture that is too complex for the plagiarist to reproduce. In earlier examples of paño art, many artists did not sign their work at all because they were drawn for specific people who knew who they came from. Besides, individuality lay in the paño's story and not in the artist's name so a signature was unnecessary. Since the mid 1990's, artists have tended to sign and date their work as it enters the commercial art world. More paños are being made today for a commercial audience.

The marketplace's demand for hardcore subject matter has been increasing since the mid 1990's. Younger artists favor *viaje* compositions and the demonic imagery of drug-induced trips. As the artists compete with each other, they introduce more horrifying images and their compositions become more sophisticated and complex. These paños are intended for a voyeuristic audience, and their images are actually safe because they are not very personal. Like masks, they do not reveal the artist's intimate feelings. Recent paños have been criticized for lacking *corazon*, sentiments that are traditionally found in paños made by older generations.

Duality

The experience of duality is intrinsic to Chicano culture. Its origins are found in the Aztec principle of opposites – win/lose, man/woman, sin/redemption, life/death – and it is a major theme from the Pre-Hispanic past. It is evident in Chicano attempts to reconcile their Mexican and American nationalities, in the nostalgia they feel for *La Raza* and their expression of a new American attitude and style.

For Chicanos in prison who yearn for life outside, reality collides with fantasy and their experience of duality is intensified. To survive the prison experience, inmates project an emotionless public face to mask a private self that overflows with feelings. Such duality is expressed often in paño art by the written phrase, “Smile Now, Cry Later” and is suggested by pictures of masks and clowns.

The world of emotions that lies between these opposing states of being is the great theme of paño art. It is a world where every human emotion is exposed from faith, love, hope and dreams to regrets, longing, sadness, fear and rage. Paños are “tales of humanity flowing forth from a tragic source, yet behind the images are emotions that are familiar to all human beings.” Whether they are love letters, narratives of personal loss or prayers for redemption, every paño tells a story.

“The reason I do art is to be remembered by my familia should anything happen to me while doing time. It is the only thing that I have to give of myself.”

Manuel Montoya, août 1986

“Art is power. Like faith, it can change your life in a positive manner. When I take up my pen and put down my thoughts, feelings, hope and dreams, I have freedom.”

Melvin Sedillo, février 1992

“The paño becomes the canvas of his soul expressing yesterday's sorrow and tomorrow's hope.”

Rudy Padilla