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# Illustrated Identities: The Book in the Latino Imaginary

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**Title: *Illustrated Identities: The Book in the Latino Imaginary***

**Exhibited: March 5-May 5, 2011, Herzstein Latin American Reading Room, Zimmerman Library, UNM**

**Curators: Pauline Heffern, Wendy Pedersen, Suzanne M. Schadl, Kristen Valencia**

*Illustrated Identities: The Book in the Latino Imaginary* examines Latino/a or Chicano/a imaginations as expressed in books that traverse time and space, crossing and doubling back on boundaries that are both physically and culturally inscribed, and also tightly bound within one another. It features creative and critical texts in two distinct spaces.

The first area, just inside the door of the gallery, is designed to appear and serve as a living space. It harkens back to earliest manifestation of Nuyorican Poet's Café, which first embraced and promoted Latino/a, Chicano/a talent in poet Miguel Algarin's living room. The rasquache inspired space in this exhibit welcomes that same spirit of openness and appreciation for Latino/a Chicano/a and Hispano/a works. The book case, end table, treasure chest and chairs welcome the UNM community into the space to read, chat and, more importantly, to share their work and ideas. The space contains pieces from the University Libraries' circulating collections as well as personal items from the homes of Inter-American Studies employees.

The second space, lining the corridor into the Latin American Reading Room, features items from the Center for Southwest Research (CSWR) and Special Collections. These pieces highlight pivotal mentors of Chicano/a and Hispano/a talent in New Mexico, including Rudolfo Anaya, Cecilio García-Camarillo and Delilah Montoya, a photographer and printmaker whose increasingly well-recognized *Codex Delilah, Six Deer: A Journey From Mechica to Chicana*, on display in this exhibit, follows the Chicana protagonist from Southern Mexico to Aztlán, which she situates within Albuquerque's Sandia Mountains.

The broad success of Rudolfo Anaya's novel *Bless Me Ultima*, published twenty years earlier than Delilah's *Codex*, propelled Anaya to the forefront of the Latino/Chicano literary movement. Anaya encouraged New Mexican writers and introduced his students and his community to Chicano/a literature and criticism. In 1997, he and his wife Patricia, inaugurated the annual presentation of the *Crítica Nueva* Award, established to recognize the foremost scholars in Chicano/a literary criticism. The most recent recipient, Nicolás Kanellos, worked with the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Recovery Project, which is now partially available in the Arte Público database.

Anaya was not alone in his generous support for Chicano/a literature and criticism in New Mexico. Cecilio García-Camarillo, a noted Chicano activist and publisher of Chicano/a works, also worked within New Mexico to draw attention to Chicano/a literature and performing arts. García-Camarillo's radio program *Espejos de Aztlán* (Mirrors of Aztlán) and his work with *La Compañía de Teatro de Albuquerque* invigorated the Chicano/a arts movement in New Mexico. García-Camarillo's work also addressed the complexities he recognized in Chicano/a communities throughout New Mexico and the United States.

His and Delilah Montoya's artist book *Crickets in My Mind*, also on display in this exhibit, celebrates complexity and community in varied ways. This manifestation of literary and artistic *Rasquachismo*, a Chicano/a appropriated form that uses whatever materials the artists has on hand, defies simplistic classifications of text. The book itself is bound with horsetail donated by the Navajo Reservation and the Abeyta Ranch in Las Vegas, New Mexico. The paper too is derived from human hair, including that of the artist and several friends.

The text also reflects a collage of “odds and ends”, as the author notes. It includes a condensed interview, two previously published works, a previous conversation, a letter never mailed, and a recorded counseling session. These pieces introduce two diverging characters in the Chicano movement: Ramon the philosopher on the university campus and Reies Lopez Tijerina, the armed defender of Hispano lands. The narrator recounts his personal struggle to find himself in either of these divergent arms of the “movement.”

At times compulsory and at others elective, labels and identities, whether imposed or adopted, ultimately define communities. While the “movimiento” never really reflected one community of Chicano/as or Latino/as or Hispano/as, the marginalization of diverse individuals associated with each of these different groupings, created conditions ripe for collaborations and/or support across philosophies, spaces and identities. While “tweety bird” students, as Garcia-Camarillo calls them in *Crickets in My Mind*, may never have taken up arms to defend the homeland, they yearned to connect with Reies Lopez Tijerina, by inviting him to campus.