

The San Fernando Valley Sun  
Special Edition - Dia De Los Muertos  
Catrinas Are Celebrated at the San Fernando Sun/El Sol Dia  
de Los Muertos Family Festival - Valley artist push tradition  
forward with contemporary Catrinas  
By Andrea Alegria - Sun Staff Reporter

The Day of the Dead celebration is a perfect avenue to celebrate death through art he said. "Nobody makes fun of death like we Mexicans do," he said.

A Catrina, the icon of death and most recognizable image of the Dia de Los Muertos celebration, is traditionally a skeleton (calaca or calavera) opulently dressed. Famed artist Jose Guadalupe Posada created these whimsical skeletons more than a century ago to reflect the times in which he lived in.

His skeletal illustrations captured the essence of the political and economic climate in Mexico during the 1900's, serving as social commentary on behalf of the majority of the poverty stricken population. The image of the traditional Catrina, as some have interpreted represents a servant girl dressed in her wealthy mistress' cast off hat and dress.

Today, local artist like Luis Villanueva, are breaking away from the traditional representation of the skeletal figurine, creating Catrinas that reflect characters in today's world. Villanueva's "Catrinas of everyday life," as he calls them, will be the center stage in the event Galeria during this Sunday's Dia de Los Muertos Festival in San Fernando.

Among his creations, which he made from pieces of old newspapers, cartons, and other garbage material he collected, is a rock star Catrina bearing a purple skeleton. There is also a ballerina Catrina wearing a yellow tutu and a Spanish Catrina dressed in traditional flamenco outfit. A bar table dancer Catrina wears golden high heels, fishnet stockings, a brassier and a miniskirt, while a Brazilian Catrina is ready for the Carnaval in Rio in a shiny golden bikini lined with blue and yellow feathers.

"I broke away with that traditional scheme of Catrinas, as originated by Posada and artist Diego Rivera," said 57-year-old Villanueva, a resident of Woodland Hills. "Every body usually makes the Catrinas skeleton the color of bone, but not me. My skeletons are orange, yellow, purple...."

Villanueva, who was born in Mexico and learned most of his art techniques in Guadalajara, spent ten months working on the Catrinas, which were also exhibited during last week's Hollywood Day of the Dead event. Villanueva is one of five directors who organize the annual event, which takes place at the Hollywood Cemetery.

"Art is my whole life," said Villanueva. His Catrinas, he said, evolved into "wonderful works of art" after starting off as simple piles of garbage. "I don't use anything new, I take garbage like empty toilet paper rolls, old newspapers, old lamps that I find, and recycle it and then it becomes a work of art," he said.