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Artist Brings Life to Latino Heritage, Community Concerns

By [Robert Kovacik](#)



Artist Sergio Hernandez uses his paintings to express his Latino heritage and the issues facing the community. Robert Kovacik reports for NBC4's Hispanic Heritage Special Oct. 3, 2015. (Published Saturday, Oct. 3, 2015)

When artists blend paint together, they are looking for just right the shades, just the right tones, for what they are about to create.

But in the Southern California Hispanic community, one artist mixes so much more. His works are an expression of today's headlines, politics and something very unique -- his heritage.

Far away from the city, we found the man who for decades has been a voice of Mexican-American struggles, but not through spoken words.

"I am not a very good orator or writer, but I can draw, I can draw in sound bites," said Sergio Hernandez, a respected artist in the Latino community and beyond.

A world of vibrant colors is reflected in the chili peppers he roasts in his spare time to celebrate his culture, and is reflected in the oil he puts to canvas.

Hernandez said his murals are a way to connect with the community.

“That’s a way for me to make statements about what I see, what bothers me, what bothers a lot of people who don’t say thing about these issues,” he said.

Issues like immigration.

“The irony is, the people who are going to be building the wall are the people you are trying to keep out of your country,” he said.

He thinks about historical parallels.

“It just hit me one day that the farm workers’ struggle for a living wage is almost as epic as the battle of Iwo Jima.”

The 66-year-old man, who was raised in a modest home in South LA, has turned to art as a rallying cry since he was a young man.

In the 1960s, the college student and a cadre of colleagues created a literary magazine in Los Angeles called “Consafos”, meaning “with respect.”

It was conceived and published because there was no Chicano venue for artists and poets.

These days, Sergio is relying more and more on pen-and-ink as the medium for his message.

Sergio has even contributed his cartoons to the Antelope Valley Press, a newspaper covering one of LA County’s most conservative areas.

“I wanted to connect to a larger audience. They didn’t always publish everything though,” he said, laughing.

Hernandez said he has always kept his humor about him in his work, something that is clear and evident in some pieces.

North Korea's dictator as King Kong conquering Sony, remembering journalists killed by terrorists.

And then, of course, the current media darling, Donald Trump.

"Yes, he is a character," Hernandez said.

But his inspiration comes not just from current events, but what he has witnessed working for LA County for more than thirty years.

"I was an investigator for the public defender's office. I saw a lot of problems with the family structure. Everything is not great and good. The issues are out there. We need to address them," he said.

Hernandez said he believes he has captured in one his most controversial paintings, an almost-banned painting from an exhibition honoring "Our Lady of Guadalupe."

"These guys that have these tattoos on them, other religious icons, and then they are out mistreating their families," he said.

It's called "The Last Slap."

"She's there, she's not going to take it any longer," he said. "We need to empower women and it's happening."

Though his past works include contributing to a mural that once hung at the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, what's ahead is hard to envision.

"You have these clashes of cultures, it's bad," he said.

The artist is working on a triptych of Mexican-American history for the LA County Chicano Employees Association. Of the three panels, the past is already hanging, the

present is underway. But he has yet to decide what to do with the panel designated for the future.

“I don’t know how I am going to deal with it,” he said, looking at the blank canvas.

But the colors will undoubtedly come and so will the message. The art of Sergio Hernandez never suggests staying silent.

“We need our voices to be heard.”

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