

Compare and Contrast: Enrique Chagoya + Nelson Leirner

Art + Social Justice

Themes

- Colonization
- Oppression
- Power
- Imperialism
- Consumerism
- Pop culture
- Indigenous culture
- History of the Americas

The following artworks are in the permanent collection of the Santa Barbara Museum of Art.

Each work relates to the theme of art and social justice. Explore their meanings, answer questions, and discuss together.

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Enrique Chagoya

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Enrique Chagoya

(Mexican, b. 1953, active USA)

1492, 1989

Charcoal and pastel on paper

SBMA, Museum purchase with funds
provided by SBMA Friends of
Contemporary Art, 1996.7.

© Enrique Chagoya



Enrique Chagoya

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1. The artwork's title is *1492*. What happened that year?
2. Two fists dominate the composition. What are they holding? What emotion do they make you feel?
3. How might the artist be addressing colonization in his drawing?



Enrique Chagoya



The work of California-based artist Enrique Chagoya explores topics including colonization, mythology, and popular culture. In 1492, the large fist refers to Spain's colonization of the Americas—the blood-tipped sword symbolizing the violent subjugation of indigenous peoples by the Europeans. The smaller fist takes the form of Mickey Mouse, referencing the economic and cultural imperialism of the United States on Mexico. Finally, the red figure—with two sets of hands and feet—represents Xipe Totec, the Mesoamerican god of spring and fertility, who would wear the skin of a human victim. Together, these symbols show the clash of cultures and history of imperialism in the Americas.

Nelson Leirner

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Nelson Leirner

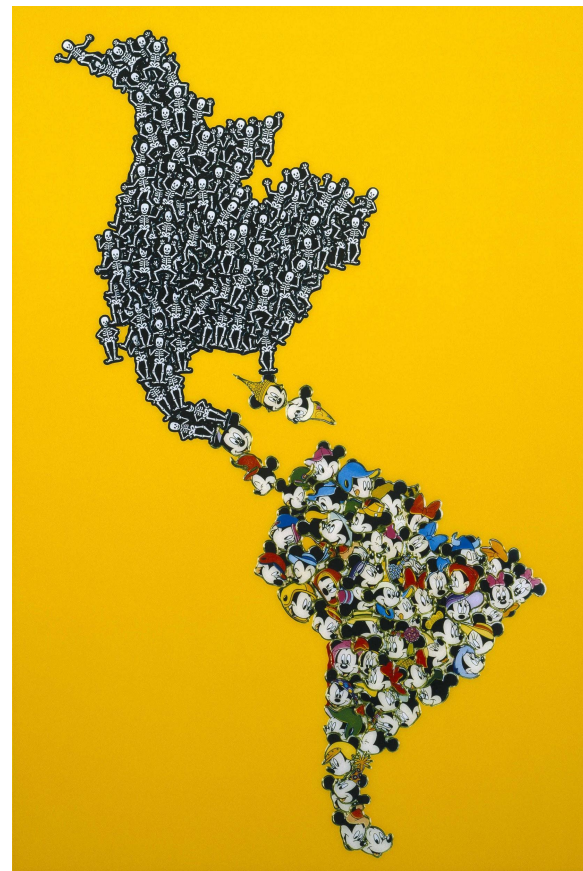
(Brazilian, 1932–2020)

Untitled, from the series,
*Right You Are If You Think
You Are*, 2003

Color photograph mounted on
aluminum

SBMA, Museum purchase with funds
provided by Larry and Astrid
Hammett, 2004.1.1-2.

© Estate of Nelson Leirner



Nelson Leirner

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1. What symbols does Leirner insert into the map? What do you think these represent?
2. How does the artwork's meaning change when Leirner flips the position of the symbols?
3. What message or critique do you think Leirner is trying to convey with these two photographs?



Nelson Leirner



Nelson Leirner was born in São Paulo, Brazil in 1932. He became known for creating artworks that critiqued consumer culture and high art, often by wittily incorporating popular imagery and graphics. Leirner's works from 2003 remind us that outdated modes of thinking about the Americas no longer hold. Using cartography or maps as a starting point, he shows us the fallacy of believing we can contain the complex reality of "America" within geographic boundaries. Not only does he invite viewers to question the artificial distinctions of maps and borders, he also pokes fun of our popular conceptions of what being American means.

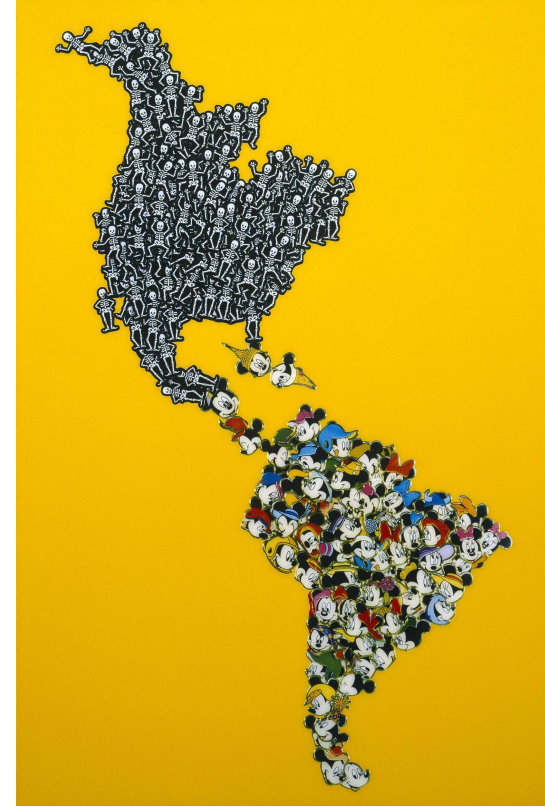
Nelson Leirner



Using icons from pop culture like Mickey Mouse and the calaveras or skeletons popular in Latin American folk culture, Leirner invites us to explore what those popular symbols stand for in today's globalized world.

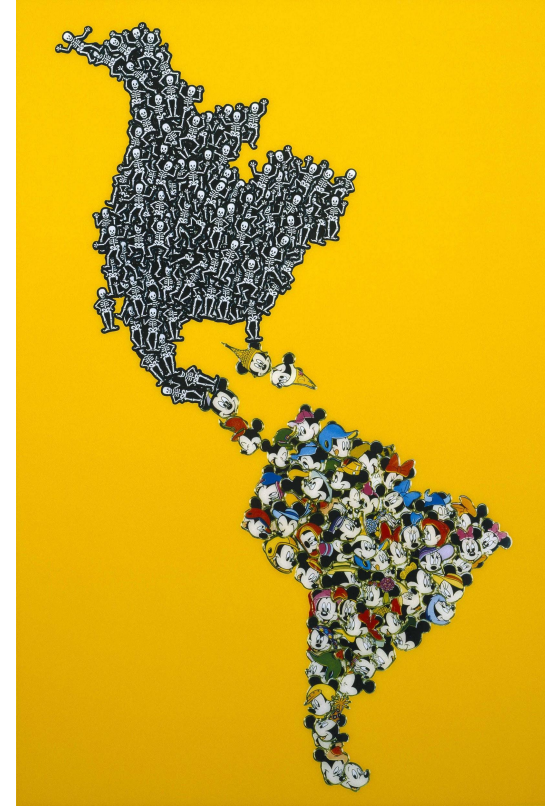
When Leirner flips the images (putting the skeletons in North America and the Mickeys in South America) he is also flipping our sensibilities, inviting us to see that the definition of America—or what is an American—is a matter of perception.

Compare + Contrast



DISCUSS: What are the similarities and differences between these two artworks?

Compare + Contrast



DISCUSS: Both artists use Mickey Mouse in their work. What other symbols could they have used to represent globalization or pop culture in the Americas?

Art + Social Justice



This presentation was created by the Education Department at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art in 2020 in collaboration with Santa Barbara-based high school teachers.

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