**Day of the Dead: José Guadalupe Posada, Father of La Catrina**

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Since his death a century ago, José Guadalupe Posada's work has steadily gained popularity with art lovers and Día de los Muertos celebrators alike. He is especially known for his Calaveras images of whimsical skeletons.

Posada, born in 1852 in the Mexican state of Aguascalientes, began his career as a teacher of lithography. In 1887, he moved to Mexico City where he worked as an illustrator for hire.

His work reflected the times in which he lived. Posada's illustrations made the stories, news articles, broadsides, advertisements and the many other items his work accompanied easy to grasp for a poverty-stricken population that overwhelmingly was illiterate.

Truly defining the phrase "a picture speaks a thousand words," he captured the essence of an emotion, putting it in a form that made it come to life for thousands of people.

Posada created hundreds of images to accompany the lyrics of corridos (Mexican ballads). The corridos were mostly topical, relaying the death of a bullfighter, the beginnings and ending of the Mexican revolution, and while the lyrics filled in the stories, it was the music and artist's images that rounded out the feeling behind the songs.

Eventually settling down as the chief illustrator for Antonio Vanegas Arroyo in Mexico City, Posada created nearly 20,000 images during his career.

During Posada's time working for the publisher, Dictator Porfirio Diaz's rule over Mexico City was not one that was celebrated by its citizens. Posada's illustrations clearly showed the general feeling of disdain for the corrupt government, helping to mold negative public opinion of Diaz and the company he kept.

Posada was regarded as the voice of the common man and helped to solidify art as a means to communicate the public's unhappiness and skepticism of the government. He used the practice of caricaturizing figures as skeletons to serve as a sort of satirical obituary. While he lampooned people of all classes, it was his rendering of the aristocrats, whom Diaz held in such high regard, that remains the most popular of Posada's vast catalog work.

"La Catrina" is one such image. Although the illustration of the high-society woman is one of Posada's most highly regarded pieces, it's also arguably the most recognizable image of the Día de los Muertos celebrations.

In fact, many of Posada's calaveras can be seen at Día de los Muertos festivals today. The caretas (masks) worn at the end of the celebrations to scare the dead away from their altars are often times either reproductions of or influenced by Posada's illustrations.

The style and sentiment in Posada's work fueled an artistic movement in the years following his death in 1913. Muralists Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco, who became heavyweights in the Mexican art community, both named Posada as a major influence on their work.

In life, Posada received what amounted to just a few cents for each of his drawings. He lived a humble life and, upon his death, was buried in a common grave. However, there was nothing ordinary about him.