

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

### Stories, Social Conscience and Art

Emily Costello

*My art* is inspired by my Mexican heritage, its cultural icons, imagery, and by the events that have shaped my life. Born and raised in the small copper town of Superior, Arizona, I am strongly influenced by my grandmother, who always encouraged me to create, and by the stories she passed onto me—stories that not only give place and meaning to our existence but also touch upon the allegorical and universal experiences that we all share—issues of identity, humor, life, love, death, spirituality, dreams, and memories. My goal is that my paintings will be brought to life to tell their own stories. I strive to invoke humor, irony, social conscience, and a sense that although we all engage in behaviors that differentiate ourselves from one another, we are all still connected to one community. Inspired by Mexican folk artists who make art from the heart and with whatever materials they have at hand, my mixed media and assemblages are created with found objects that are reassembled, reimagined, and recreated into a new life and new meaning.

In *Justicia*, (acrylic on wood), I am responding to Lady Justice, who is often depicted wearing a blindfold. The blindfold represents objectivity, in that justice is or should be meted out objectively, without fear or favor, regardless of identity, personal wealth, power, or weakness; blind justice and impartiality. She is most often depicted with a set of scales suspended from her right hand, upon which she measures the strengths of a case's support and opposition. Although Justicia's scales appear to be equal, we know our legal system fails too many victims. The bandana used to cover her eyes represents the less privileged

who are not afforded liberty and justice. The calavera (skull) in the border of the painting lacks a mouth, therefore a voice. We rely on “Justicia” to help us find our voice. This voice is our birthright that lives in our minds, hearts, and souls. The flower border represents a blossoming hope that some day—justice for all—really means all.

*Madam & Eve*, (acrylic on canvas) was inspired by my belief in marriage equality for ALL. Regardless of sexual orientation or identity, our friends and family members deserve no less than the equal rights accorded to every other American family. The painting was completed a year ago. At that time, the flowers in the painting represented the state flowers of the thirteen states that had legalized same-sex marriage. A year later, same-sex marriage is legal in thirty-one states.

Día de los Muertos and the Irish proverb “Death leaves a heartache no one can heal; love leaves a memory no one can steal” inspired *Pienso en Ti*, (acrylic). I am inspired by Mexicans’ celebration of Día De Los Muertos to honor their loved ones who have passed. It is their belief that people die three legendary deaths, the third being the most poignantly final. The first death is the failure of the body. The second is the burial of the body. The most definitive death is the third death which occurs when no one is left to remember us. Life and death are universal. The angelito sings “Pienso en ti / I think of you” in remembrance of the ones we’ve lost, so that they will never be forgotten.

*Libertad*, (acrylic) speaks to the moral crisis at our border; children who live in crushing poverty, fleeing violence from drug cartels and gangs, or trying to join a parent who left years ago being denied basic human rights by those who are motivated by racial fear and hatred. The traditional papier maché dolls each represent these children, who face horrible obstacles, even death, in order to live.

*El Nopal*, (acrylic on wood) is based in part by the Nopal card of the Lotería, which has written on the backside “Al nopal lo van a ver, nomás cuando tiene tunas.” The nopal only receives attention when it bears fruit. When women find their voice, we “bear our fruit” and we receive the attention we deserve. This voice is our birthright that lives in our minds, hearts, and souls. When we share our voice we contribute to the greater good.