

## ART AND IMMIGRATION

*Immigration in the Visual Art of Nicario Jiménez Quispe*. By Carol Damian, Michael J. LaRosa, and Steve Stein. Foreword by Annette Fromm. Lanham, Md: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019. Pp. xii, 131. Illustrations. Bibliography. Index. \$39.00 cloth. doi:10.1017/tam.2021.32

Nicario Jiménez Quispe is a third-generation maker of *retablos*, painted wooden boxes with doors that open to reveal intricate scenes featuring miniature polychrome figures and objects. This beautifully illustrated volume, authored by two historians and an art historian, presents Jiménez Quispe's work from the 1980s to the present. Color photographs of the artist's *retablos* are the centerpiece of the book, while five brief chapters oriented toward a generalist reader trace the manner in which Jiménez Quispe's work has developed through his own experiences of migration, first internal to his native Peru, and eventually, to the United States. Jiménez Quispe's *retablos* offer compassionate and critical perspectives on migrant experiences of poverty, violence, racism, and classism, as well as affirmations of migrant success and survival. Inspired by diverse hemispheric American visual cultures, the artist's recent work attests to emergent Latina/o/x communities in US cities where migrants from diverse locations make their homes.

The *retablos ayacuchanos* that Jiménez Quispe creates evolved from a form called the *cajón sanmarcos* (San Marcos box), named for the patron of animal herds and associated with rural Andean communities of the Ayacucho Department. Following the conquest, the Catholic devotional aspects of *retablos* overlapped to some extent with long-standing indigenous Andean practices associated with *wak'a* (huaca), or offerings to earth beings that are deposited in sacred locations. Through the centuries, the boxes went from being objects of exchange between makers and shepherds to being portable devotional items that were also displayed in homes. By the 1940s, *retablos* depicting a range of themes were being mass-produced in Ayacucho for sale to Limeño tourists and collectors. The typical *retablo* is capped with a triangular pediment, and its doors are secured by a leather strap. Inside are scenes depicted on one or two levels. Once carved from alabaster, the figures that Jiménez Quispe places in his *retablos* are sculpted from a special paste made from potato flour and gypsum.

In the early 1970s, Jiménez Quispe left his home in the Quechua-speaking village of Alcamenca to reside in the regional center of Ayacucho. From there he migrated to the coastal capital of Lima, where he struggled to support his family by selling his *retablos*. By the late 1970s, Jiménez Quispe had departed from typical themes to make unique *retablos*—“*retablos* for ‘gringos,’ in the language of his grandfather” (19). His sensitive explorations of Andean culture, the civil war, and internal migration attracted the attention of scholars, including historian Steve Stein, co-author of the present volume, who met Jiménez Quispe while in Lima in 1980. Seven years later, Stein

invited the artist to hold a brief residency at the University of Miami. After several more visits to the United States as a guest of academic and cultural institutions, Jiménez Quispe moved in the early 1990s to Naples, Florida, where he currently resides and maintains his workshop. He became a naturalized citizen of the United States in 2004, and his work has garnered international recognition from prominent cultural institutions and collectors.

Jiménez Quispe's visual exploration of political, social, and personal themes entails experimentation with the structural elements of the retablo form itself. For example, in "Yawar Fiesta" (The Festival of Blood, 1990), depicting the conflict between Spanish colonizers and indigenous people as a violent contest between a bull and a condor, the pediment of the retablo itself is transformed into the head of a condor, and the doors are its wings (21). In "La Migración" (Migration, 1985), depicting Andean migrants traveling from the highlands to Lima, three interior levels of the retablo not only reference sequential moments in a narrative, but also distinct locations on the road to Lima which are subtly indicated by the diminishing amount of blue in the sky.

Meanwhile, through the decades, Jiménez Quispe's modeling of human and animal figures becomes increasingly realist and individuated, while he uses perspective to create expansive interior backgrounds that extend to the interior surfaces of the retablos' doors. These techniques lend themselves to the creation of ambitious panoramas depicting diverse Latina/o/x peoples in the United States, such as "Triunfo Latino" (Latino Triumph, 1999). This work literally stands the retablo form on its head, with sobering single-level interior scenes of perilous border crossings into the United States, and a "triumphal" pediment consisting of a four-story hotel subdivided into 12 compartments where Latina/o/x people congregate and socialize.

Appealing to the language of transcendence, the authors of this volume aver that Jiménez Quispe is an *artist*, based on the originality and quality of his work, with all that these values imply in terms of currency in metropolitan art worlds:

Jiménez elevates his subjects technically, stylistically, and conceptually into the mainstream, through the work's sophistication and intellectualism; his work should be considered according to the same formal concepts that are used to describe and analyze the production of any art for future generations to see, study, and appreciate (12).

At the same time, they argue that Jiménez Quispe's interventions in retablo thematics and production techniques restore the genre to its "original purpose. . . [speaking] inwardly to the artist and to his community, rather than outwardly to tourists" (26). The authors repeatedly use the phrase "testimonial retablo" to describe Jiménez Quispe's visual interpretation of collective experiences of violence, genocide, racism, and border militarization, while also affirming Latina/o/x and Andean cultural values. The distinctions that the volume makes between high art and folk art, art for

the community and art for tourists, as well as the multiple publics and economies in which Jiménez Quispe's work circulates, merit further examination. The authors' implicit association of the retablos with testimonial literature seems a potentially fruitful vector for future studies, given the roles of scholars and arts administrators in facilitating awareness of Jiménez Quispe's retablos among institutions, galleries, and patrons.

In 1990 Nicario Jiménez Quispe was teaching a course at Whittier College near Los Angeles. During that period, he visited Tijuana and created a retablo titled "Border Patrol" ("Cruzando la Frontera" [Crossing the Border], 1990), which incorporates images of the Virgin of Guadalupe in a manner similar to her presentation in Mexican retablos. This marks the beginning of Jiménez Quispe's ongoing engagement with comparative and intersecting Latina/o/x migrations to the United States and his citation of retablo and ex-voto imagery from across the Americas.

In addition to creating several retablos depicting migrant crossings at the US-Mexico border, the artist has made works reflecting on the Central American civil wars and the experiences of Haitian and Cuban migrants to the United States. In one of Jiménez Quispe's recent retablos, "Immigration: The Wall" (2015), a small sign for the Tierra Peruana restaurant appears amid a busy Miami street scene, reminding us of other migrant journeys parallel to that of the artist. With his deep commitment to confronting the injustices experienced by migrants, it is not surprising that the Trump administration has given Jiménez Quispe many ideas for future projects.

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## US AND BRAZILIAN MEDIA

*Imagining the Mulatta: Blackness in U.S. and Brazilian Media.* By Jasmine Mitchell.  
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Images of women of mixed African and European descent have figured prominently in representations of national belonging and social identities in the Americas. Jasmine Mitchell places these images within a hemispheric framework that highlights the United States' and Brazil's shared histories of colonization, slavery, and anti-Blackness. Without neglecting the significant differences in the systems of racial and gender classification that characterize Brazilian and US contexts, Mitchell highlights how the mulatta (or *mulata* in Brazil) has generated significant tensions and anxieties about the place of Blackness in the Americas.