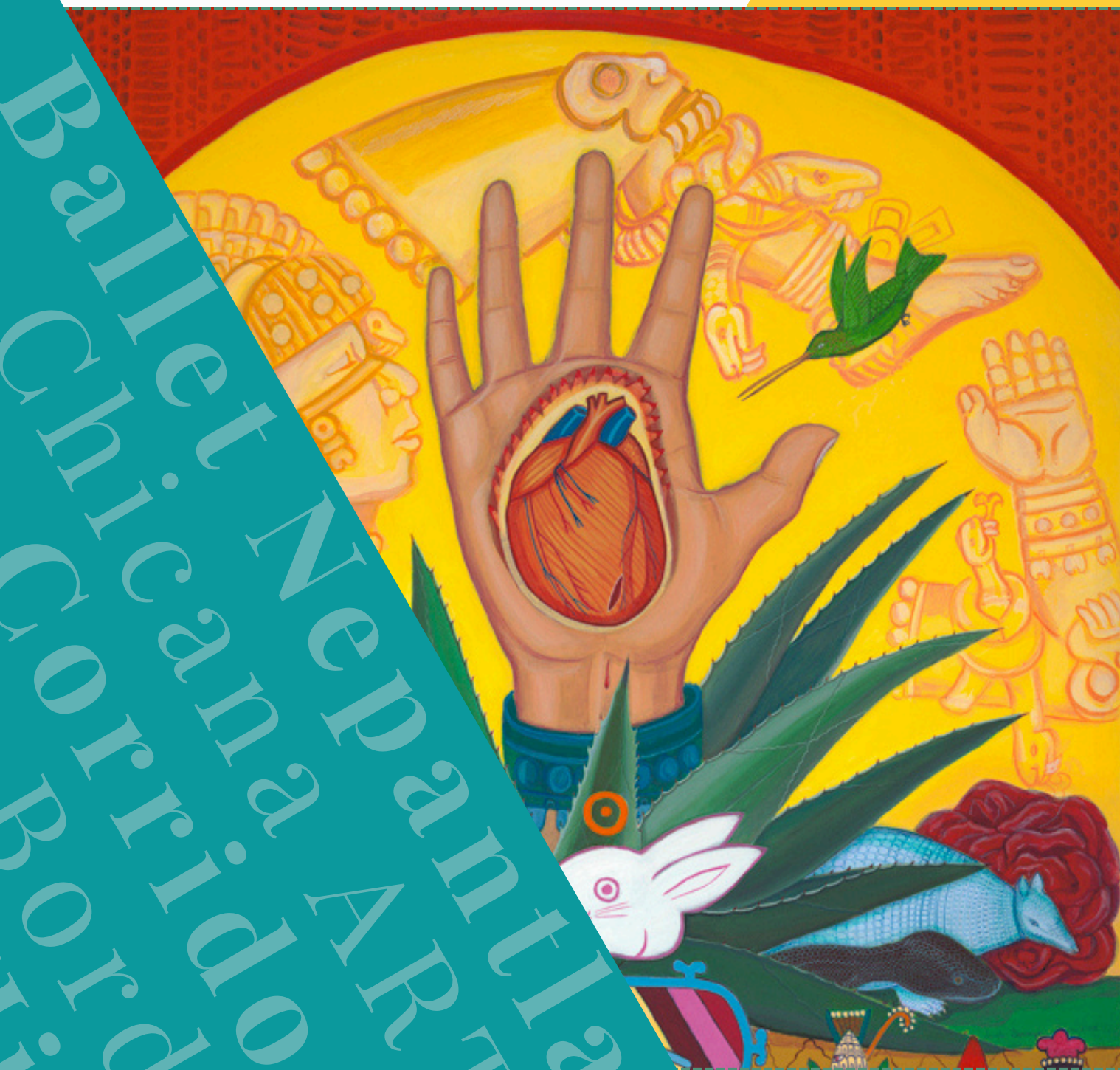


Center for Mexican American Studies



Celebrando Cultura, Comunidad y Conocimiento en el RGV
Celebrating Culture, Community, and Scholarship in the RGV



Artwork by Santa Barraza

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR



DR. GEORGE T. DÍAZ
Director
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When I was still in grad school, I learned something about my field that gave me a better appreciation for my area of study. When writing History, it is important to remember it is 'A' history, not 'The' history. This understanding recognizes that what we write contributes but does not define or limit the subject. I have taken this lesson with me throughout my career. I am honored to have served as a Director of the Center for Mexican American Studies at UTRGV. What we do we do for others, and I am happy to have helped continue CMAS's legacy of offering quality substantive programming to the community we serve; from welcoming students and guests to the center, to hosting performances by Ballet Nepantla, and presenting discussions by expert scholars and prize-winning journalists for the benefit of all. History is also the study of change over time, and as my time as director closes, I look forward to seeing the Center's future work.



Dr. George Díaz (CMAS Director), Gina Palacios (CMAS Associate Director),
Vice Provost Dr. Joy Esquerido (Office for Bilingual Integration, & Raquel Pérez (CMAS Program Manager)

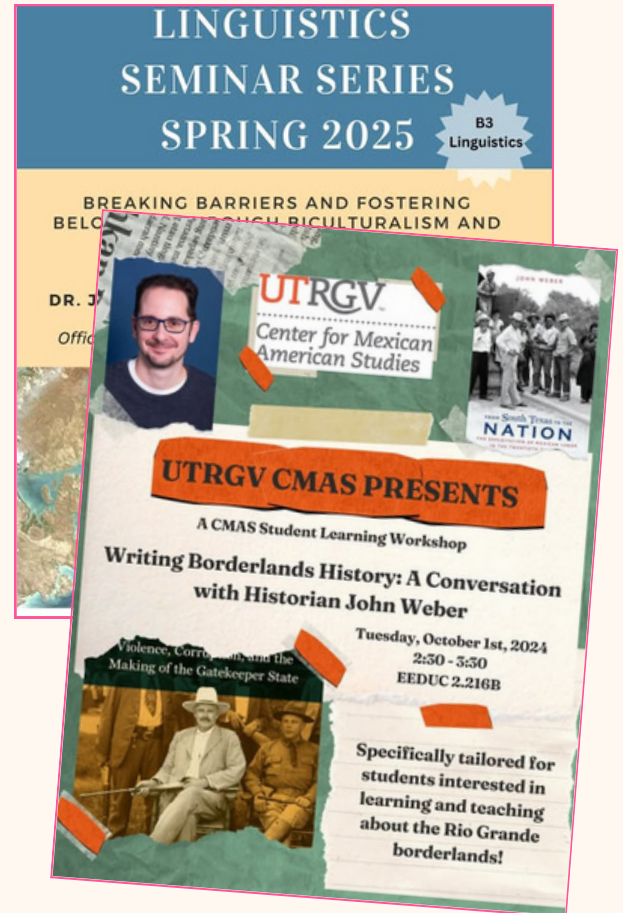
Borderlands History: A Conversation with Historian John Weber

October 2024

CMAS hosted "Writing Borderlands History: A Conversation with Historian Dr. John Weber," a student-centered workshop designed to delve into the unique historical experiences of the Rio Grande borderlands.

Dr. Weber, an expert in Mexican labor exploitation and borderlands history, shared insights from his acclaimed books *From South Texas to the Nation: The Exploitation of Mexican Labor in the Twentieth Century* and *William Hanson and the Texas-Mexico Border: Violence, Corruption, and the Making of the Gatekeeper State*, as well as other research.

This workshop was tailored specifically for students eager to explore borderland history. Led by CMAS Director, Dr. George T. Díaz, this event highlighted the significance of regional history and how our past continues to shape the Mexican American experience today.



TEDx McAllen

October 2024



CMAS would like to congratulate Vice Provost for Bilingual Integration, Dra. Joy Esquiedo for her TED talk, "Redefining Quality Education: Opening Opportunities for True Belonging". In her presentation, she advocates for a transformative approach to education—one that embraces bilingualism, biculturalism, and biliteracy as essential pillars of learning from early childhood through to career development.

Ballet Nepantla

October 2024



CMAS proudly partnered with Ballet Nepantla to present a series of free events that beautifully embodied our mission to honor and amplify the Rio Grande Valley's rich cultural heritage. Ballet Nepantla fuses contemporary dance with Mexican folklorico to explore new interpretative ways of delving into cultural and historical "in-between-ness." From the breathtaking performance of *Mística* to an insightful plática on culturally sustaining pedagogy and an engaging dance master class, these events celebrated the power of movement, storytelling, and tradition. Each event deepened our collective understanding of Mexican American and borderland experiences, while fostering community, creativity, and critical inquiry—core values that drive CMAS' commitment to education, community engagement, and cultural empowerment.

CMAS extends heartfelt thanks to our co-sponsors, the **School of Interdisciplinary Programs & Community Engagement**, the **College of Liberal Arts**, **The Center for Latin American Arts**, the **Department of History**, as well as the **Office of the Provost**, for their generous support in making this event come to life.

Ballet Nepantla: Dance Master Class

CMAS also hosted Ballet Nepantla's Dance Master Class, led by artistic director Andrea Guajardo, co-founder and choreographer Martin Rodriguez, and dancer/choreographer Argelia Hernandez. This unique class offered students and community members an exciting fusion of Folklorico, classical and contemporary ballet, West African, and modern dance.

Participants had the rare opportunity to learn from these accomplished artists, experiencing firsthand the blend of traditional and contemporary dance forms. The master class not only highlighted the diversity and richness of dance but also underscored how movement can serve as a powerful tool for cultural expression and connection.



Ballet Nepantla: Dia de los Muertos Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy through Meaningful Movement



In October, we had the pleasure of hosting a special plática by Ballet Nepantla's dance director, Andrea Guajardo, titled Día de los Muertos: Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy Through Meaningful Movement. This event, organized by CMAS, provided insights into how culturally sustaining pedagogy can be effectively integrated into the classroom through dance and storytelling.

Andrea, an Edinburg native, shared her personal testimonio on the power of movement to tell stories, create connections, and honor cultural heritage. Students and faculty alike engaged with new ways of embedding meaningful cultural practices into their teaching methods. This event highlighted the transformative potential of combining art and education.

Ballet Nepantla Performance: Mística

To culminate our celebration, the Edinburg Performing Arts Center came alive as CMAS hosted Ballet Nepantla's stunning performance of *Mística*, which captivated an audience of over 500 from across the Rio Grande Valley.

This unique production paid tribute to Día de los Muertos, blending ballet folklórico with contemporary dance to honor the creative and spiritual energies of indigenous, Afro, and Hispanic roots. Through the striking use of blacklight, *Mística* offered a vivid portrayal of the afterlife, weaving together tradition and innovation. The performance served as a powerful homage to ancestral heritage, leaving a lasting impression on all who attended.



Film Screening: Llorona

October 2024

CMAS, in collaboration with the College of Liberal Arts, hosted a free public screening of a short film inspired by the legend of La Llorona. The film was directed by UTRGV's own Silvia Vera-Huesca, who was present at the event to engage with the audience during a Q&A session. Attendees also enjoyed the sharing of local ghost stories and complimentary tamales.

Silvia Vera-Huesca is a Mexican theater and film producer, actress, writer, mother, and Lecturer in the Department of Writing and Language Studies. Her creative work centers on Mexican American border life and bio-cultural experiences.



Costume Parade

October 2024

CMAS proudly joined the Childhood Development Center in a lively costume parade that celebrated the creativity and imagination of our youngest community members. Over 200 kids participated, donning costumes inspired by beloved characters and original themes, filling the center with laughter, color, and excitement.

Each costume reflected the individuality and spirit of its young creator, transforming the event into a vibrant showcase of childhood wonder. This joyful celebration not only highlighted the magic of early learning but also strengthened community bonds, leaving lasting smiles on the faces of all who attended.



El Corrido de Dionisio Maldonado Family, Memory, and History in the Borderlands

November 2024

CMAS hosted *El Corrido de Dionisio Maldonado: Family, Memory, and History in the Borderlands*, a moving event that explored the 1920 killings of three Mexican American men in South Texas. While U.S. law enforcement at the time labeled the victims as liquor smugglers, local families preserved a different account—one rooted in memory, oral history, and a traditional corrido that has endured for generations. The event highlighted the importance of reclaiming and honoring these community narratives, which challenge official versions of the past.

The event featured guest speakers Marianella Q. Franklin, a descendant of the victims, and Washington Post journalist Arelis R. Hernández, who reported on the family's efforts to preserve this history and the broader implications of confronting historical injustice. A special thank you to the **UTRGV Conjunto Club** who delivered a powerful musical performance that added depth and emotion to the gathering.



CMAS is proud to have hosted this meaningful and unforgettable event and extends heartfelt thanks to our co-sponsor, the **Department of History**, the family who joined us, and all who contributed to a great event.



MAS Affiliates Meetings

Spring 2025

During the Spring semester, CMAS hosted two engaging pláticas with MAS affiliate faculty, each focused on fostering dialogue, collaboration, and strategic planning for the future of our center. These gatherings provided valuable opportunities to share ideas, strengthen connections, and explore ways to expand our impact on students and the community. We're grateful for the thoughtful contributions from faculty and look forward to building on these conversations in the coming year. As we enter a new year, we are excited to invite you to a special plática where we can brainstorm and discuss growth opportunities for CMAS.



Charreada

February 2025



In February, CMAS proudly participated in UTRGV's annual Charreada celebration on the Brownsville campus. This lively afternoon event, held in honor of Brownsville's Charro Days, offered a great opportunity to connect with students and showcase the work of all of the OBI Centers. Our small, but mighty, table helped raise awareness about our programs and resources, as well as introduced many students to the B3 Scholar initiative

Chicana ART!

Spring 2025



Santa Barraza, Codex of Sacred Heart, 1993, Acrylics on canvas.

In March 2025, we had the honor of hosting a powerful and enriching event centered on the legacy and impact of Chicana Art. From scholarly presentations to an inspiring artist talk and closing reception, this event offered students and community members a rare opportunity to engage with leading voices in the field.

Chicana Art is a dynamic and evolving movement that emerged from the Chicano civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Rooted in social activism, cultural affirmation, and decolonial resistance, it encompasses a diverse range of artistic expressions that challenge mainstream narratives and reclaim Indigenous and Mexican heritage. Chicana artists have used their work to address issues of gender, identity, migration, and political struggle, creating a visual language that is deeply personal and profoundly political.

The event started with a compelling presentation by **Dr. Karen Mary Davalos**, a Professor of Chicano & Latino Studies at the University of Minnesota. Throughout her illustrious career, Dr. Davalos has challenged the norms of American art history. Her groundbreaking research spans Chicana/o art, museum studies, oral history, and decolonial methods, reshaping how we think about art, culture, and archives. As a leading voice in the field, her presentation provided a deeper understanding of Chicana art and highlighted amazing artists working today.



With a packed room we then featured an artist talk by the legendary **Santa Barraza** – a pioneering artist and educator from Kingsville, TX. Barraza is a prominent figure in Chicano/a art whose work has been instrumental in shaping the visual narrative of South Texas and beyond. Her work has transformed Chicana/o aesthetics by merging Indigenous Mesoamerican imagery with contemporary experiences. Barraza shared amazing imagery and reflected on her decades-long career, her experiences in the art world, and the cultural narratives that shape her work.

To close out the program, we invited **Dr. Constance Cortez**, a Professor in the School of Art & Design at UTRGV who specializes in Contemporary Latinx and Chicanx Art, Pre-Columbian Art, and Postcolonial Theory to moderate a panel. Together, Dr. Cortez, Dr. Davalos, and Santa Barraza discussed topics such as challenges, process, and idea generation.





Santa Barraza, Emma Tenayucca, Retablo
1991, Oils on metal.



Santa Barraza, Ben Eagle Warrior
2022

A luncheon and graduate art studio visits were scheduled for the following day, but were canceled due to the severe flooding across the Rio Grande Valley. We are grateful for the presentation, artist talk, and panel for leaving a lasting impact on all who attended.

CMAS wants to thank our co-sponsors, **The Center for Latin American Arts** for providing the food. As well as **Gender & Women Studies** and **Mexican American Studies** who helped support the honorariums for our guests.



Meet the CMAS Team!



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Citlally Briones
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Ashley Gonzalez
Student Assistant

THANK YOU!

As we close out the 2024–2025 academic year, CMAS extends its heartfelt gratitude to our generous sponsors, dedicated fellows, and the incredible team whose support made our programming possible. We are especially thankful to Dr. George Díaz for his leadership and service as Director. As he steps down to focus on research, we honor his contributions and wish him continued success.

We also want to recognize Raquel Pérez, our Program Manager, who has transitioned to a new role with the Office of the Provost. Raquel's exceptional work and organizational leadership have been instrumental in shaping CMAS into what it is today. We thank her for her commitment and vision, and we wish her all the best in her new role.

CMAS is energized for the new academic year and looks forward to expanding its impact and offerings for the UTRGV community. Here's to another year of growth, collaboration, and meaningful engagement!



Thank you 

SUPPORT THE CENTER, DONATE TODAY!



Your generous donation helps CMAS at UTRGV continue empowering students, faculty, and staff to reach their full potential. With your support, the Center will grow and evolve—expanding opportunities for academic development, community engagement, and cultural enrichment. Together, we can continue raising the voices of the RGV borderlands and fostering a vibrant future for South Texas and beyond. Every gift makes a lasting impact. Visit our website or scan the QR to donate today!

Center for Mexican American Studies

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