

Gilberto Guzman, muralist who created the large mural on Guadalupe St, which may be removed.

Photo by Nancy Dahl of Santa Fe Living Treasures

A Santa Fe Living Treasure

Honored October, 2017

Gilberto Guzman

Gilberto was one of our guest speakers in October 2017, when Voces presented, “The Personal Histories of Canyon Road,” at El Farol. He discussed his participation in the art scene on Canyon Road in the 1970s, including the mural he created—a photo recently posted by [Buddy Mays](#).

Here is his story by Nancy Dahl for Santa Fe Living Treasures:

Gilberto Guzman has come far from his humble beginning in the East Los Angeles barrio where he picked grapes, chilis, and corn during the harvest. Now he is an artistic icon, sharing his heritage and culture locally, nationally, and internationally. He does not show in a gallery, but paints canvases and murals.

Gilberto’s artistic career started late in life. He began drawing at age 22, copying Norman Rockwell illustrations from magazines and at age 40 he graduated from the San Francisco Academy of Art. He came to Santa Fe in 1971 and became involved in the Chicano muralist movement.

His unique style is easily recognized from his use of rich Mexican colors, painting figures of exaggerated size, profile and roundness. His works are a reflection of his Mexican-American roots through which he honors the unique character and diversity of the people of New Mexico. Gilberto, passionate about his craft, sees his art as a contribution to life itself and seeks to bring happiness to others through his art. It is said, “vision of his art came from within, filled with symbolism a visceral stirring of the power and beauty of the human being. The powerful and moving images of ethnic reality and struggle, emotion of pain, the simple joys of living and the beauty of being.”

His murals among other places are in the Bataan Building, the State Library, State Capitol and the Albuquerque City Parking Structure. Gilberto’s dramatic street mural can be seen driving by the New Mexico State Archives building on Guadalupe Street. He created a mural at the October Gallery in the heart of London. He was the only US artist in the series of 12 exhibits the gallery showed to reflect the world’s artistic work. In the early 90’s he was selected by the New Mexico Arts Commission to represent our state to design a commercial for Absolute Vodka. His design was so popular he was asked to design an Absolut Guzman painting. Both were full page features in national and international magazines. In Santa Fe, in 2006 “El Museo had a life time retrospective show titled Gilberto Guzman—Uncommon artistic Outpourings of a Common Man which showed the breath, depth, intensity, and character of his art.

Gilberto is a friend to the young aspiring artists. He volunteers at El Museo curating art shows for youth, gives art classes at youth group homes and at El Museo. He helps paint sets for theater performances.

His own words illustrate Gilberto’s feelings about his art.

“Art just makes people feel good.”

“I like to expose art to people who don’t go to museums.”

1985 New Mexico Magazine article, he said,

“Harvest shows people picking fruit and gathering vegetables on one side of the wall and on the other shows people picking roses. This represents the balance of life that is so important and that art can provide. It’s a dream I have, to get that balance between the beauty and the bodily needs of life. Art is what provides the beauty and makes it more possible for people to obtain a balance in their lives.”

“I never wanted to be famous. I don’t have the temperament for that—it’s really like having a second job. I just wanted to paint. I never expected to exhibit, much less make a living at it. Selling your art can stop your creativity. I think it’s good to work at other things to support yourself.

“I tell the young bloods that being a painter is not a business. It’s an attitude, a way of elevating your life to a higher level and being a better person. I tell them to be patient, and worry about the work, not about the dollars.”

Gilberto’s art is not only beautiful and accessible, but teaches us and reminds us of our connections to each other, to our community and to the world.—murals link us to life and celebrate who we are. His murals are both uplifting and instructive and add beauty and joy to our public spaces and buildings. He reflects the legacy and heritage of what makes Santa Fe so special.

Story by Nancy Dahl

Photo © 2017 by Genevieve Russell — with Theresa Sanchez.

— with [Theresa Sanchez](#).