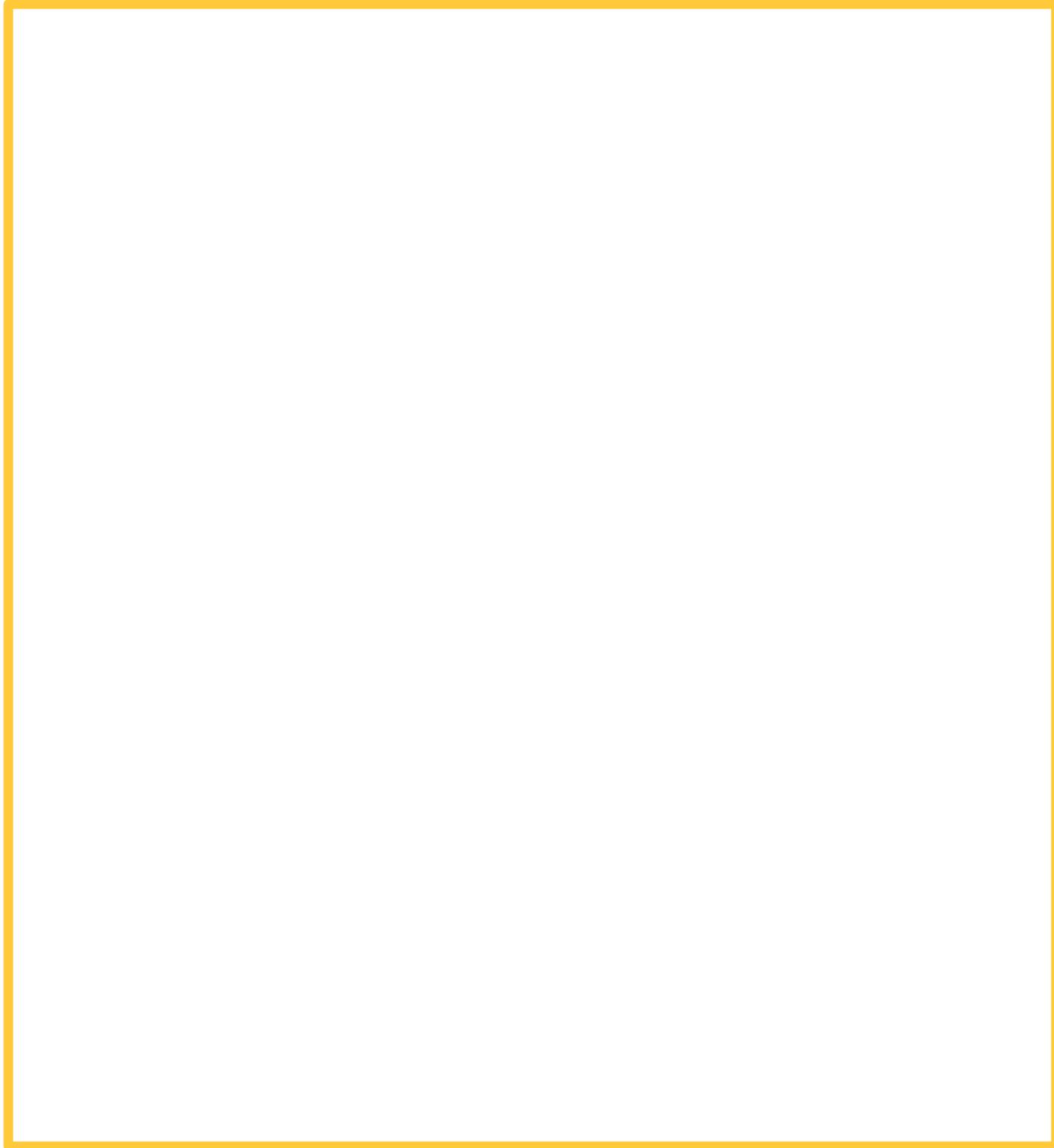


Design your own work of art with a skull! What does your skull represent — celebration? Vanity? Or something else?



Share your completed skull with us on social media [#asuartmuseum](https://twitter.com/asuartmuseum).

JOSÉ CLEMENTE

OROZCO

THE FINAL CUT

GALLERY ACTIVITY

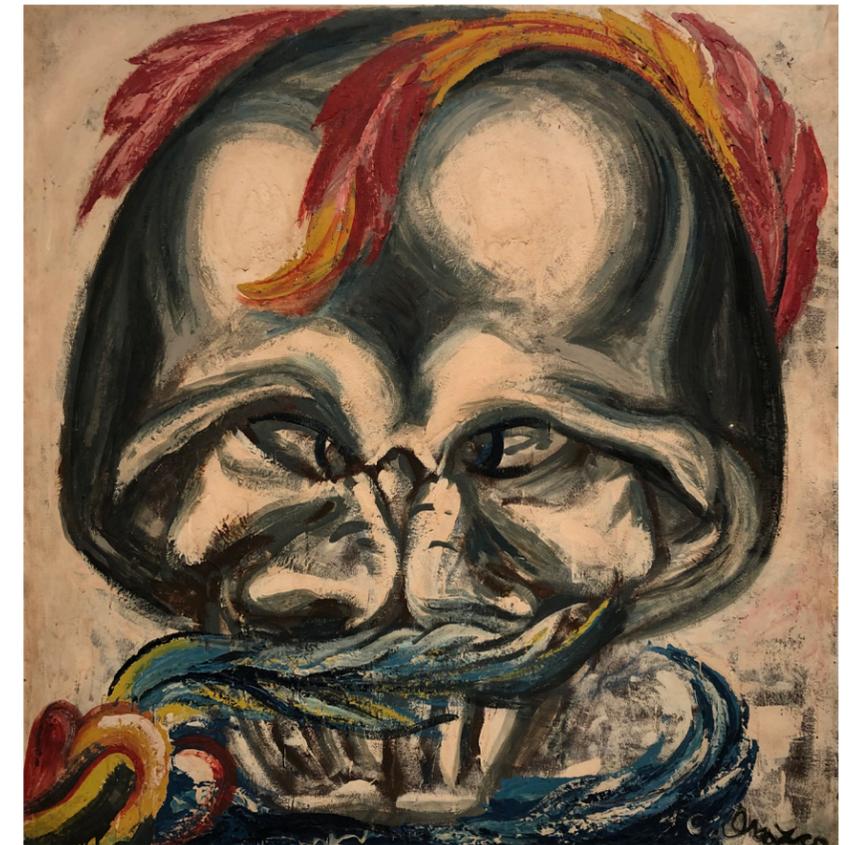


Image credit: José Clemente Orozco, "Skull with Feathers," 1947, Pyroxylin on Masonite, 48 × 45 in. Courtesy of the Orozco Family.

When you look around the exhibition, “José Clemente Orozco: The Final Cut,” you may notice there are lots of images of skulls. All these images got the education department thinking, what is the history and cultural significance of skulls? Skulls serve a variety of purposes, they can honor the dead, serve as a symbol of our limited time on this earth, or warn about danger. Let’s explore what roles skulls play in a few cultures around the world.



● Mexico

Role of skulls: Celebration of life and remembrance of lost loved ones.

Every year during the first two days of November, Mexicans celebrate Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead). The foundations of this holiday trace back to indigenous groups in Mexico — the Aztecs, Mayas and Toltecs — who lived in Mexico before the Spanish conquest in 1521. These early cultures saw death as part of the sacred cycle together with birth and life.

Día de los Muertos is a time for families to come together and celebrate the lives of loved ones lost. Families prepare ofrendas (offerings) in the form of elaborate altars. The altars are decorated with food and other gifts for departed family members. Those who celebrate Día de los Muertos believe that their departed family members return home for this celebration and enjoy all of the treats left at the altars for them.



Image credit: Pixabay

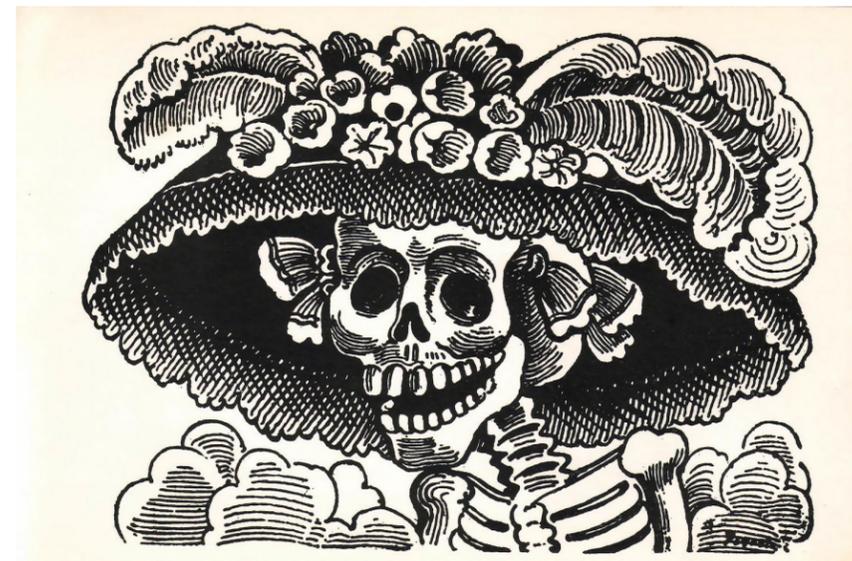


Image credit: Jose Guadalupe Posada, “La Calavera Catrina”

The image of the skull grew in popularity with the art of Jose Guadalupe Posada (1852–1913). He created artworks critiquing politics and culture of his time. His image “La Calavera Catrina,” is the icon of Día de Los Muertos and the referential image of death for Mexico.

During Día de Los Muertos, families use skulls to decorate the ofrendas, their homes and the graves of loved ones for this annual event. Skulls

made for this holiday are known for their unique style. Skulls are decorated with bright colors and intricate designs. Some skulls are even made out of sugar and used both as offerings and a treat to eat.

● Netherlands

Role of skulls: A reminder of religious and moral expectations.

The image of the skull in Mexico has a long history, but they made an appearance in the 17th century in the Netherlands. At this time vanitas, a type or genre of still-life painting was very popular. This type of painting has a collection of objects (including skulls) that symbolize the inevitability of death and the vanity of earthly achievements and possessions. The popularity of vanitas is tied to a conservative religious movement in the city of Leiden that centered a humble life focused on God.



Image credit: Unsplash

Vanitas had standard elements that were included in each work. Each work had something to represent arts and sciences (books, maps, musical instruments); wealth and power (purses, jewelry, gold objects); earthly pleasures (glasses, pipes, games); symbols of death or transience (skulls, clocks, burning candles, flowers); and sometimes a sign of eternal life (sprigs of ivy or laurel).

Contemporary artists throughout the world continue to revisit still-life works of art, using different media. Art teachers still use still-life drawing as an exercise to teach students perspective.

● Ancient India

Role of skulls: Confirmation of the power of gods and goddesses.

In India, skulls were very important imagery in religious art. Ancient gods and goddesses wore jewelry with skulls to show their ability to conquer death. In India, life and death are considered part of the experience of living and embraced not resisted.



Image credit: A painting made in Nepal depicting the Goddess Ambika Leading the Eight Matrikas in Battle Against the Demon Raktabija.