The Handbook of Tejano History Project

Example Submission

Texas State Historical Association
Spring 2014
The following is an unedited draft manuscript for an entry on artist and sculptor Luis Alfonso Jiménez, Jr. that was submitted in the early stages of the project. At two thousand words, it is considerably longer than most submissions. However, it was chosen as an example because it is well formatted and organized, meticulously researched and documented, and it addresses each of the items outlined in our content guidelines. As requested, the author also submitted copies of all source materials that were used to write the entry (select examples are provided below). These included printouts, photocopies, and photographs of the cited pages from:

- Census Records
- State Vital Statistics Records
- Newspaper Articles
- Obituaries
- Legislative Records
- Archival Materials
- Published Books
- Theses and Dissertations
- Scholarly Journal Articles
- Oral History Interviews
- Reputable Periodicals
- Catalogs and Directories
JIMÉNEZ, LUIS ALFONSO, JR. (1940-2006). Luis Alfonso Jiménez, Jr., Tejano sculptor and artist, was born in El Paso, Texas, to Luis Alfonso Jiménez, Sr., and Alicia Franco Jiménez, on July 30, 1940. Jiménez’s father (at nine years of age) and paternal grandmother had entered the United States in 1924 by wading across the Rio Grande. Jiménez, Jr.’s ten-foot tall sculpture *Border Crossing* depicts a family crossing the Rio Grande; He dedicated the piece to his grandmother and father. (His father later became a naturalized citizen.) Jiménez had a younger brother and a sister.

Luis Jiménez, Sr. was ambitious, talented, and focused. Initially he worked as a carpenter. Then he became an assistant to a man who made signs for movie theaters. He eventually became a sign designer. Jiménez, Sr. also possessed good supervisory skills. He soon became a foreman and ran the business for the owner, a Mr. Bauman. Eventually he was able to buy the business from Bauman. He changed the name of the business to Jiménez Signs, and eventually it became the biggest sign company between Dallas and Phoenix. Many businesses’ signs in El Paso were made by Jiménez Signs, including signs for Bronco Drive-In, Polar Bear Cold Storage Company, and the Sunbeam Bread Bakery.

Luis Jiménez, Sr., as a child, had won first prize in a national soap-carving contest. But instead of receiving, as advertised, an art school scholarship, what he actually received was just a certificate. That experience possibly led him to believe that a career in art was impractical.

Beginning at six years of age, Luis Jiménez, Jr. worked with his father and learned a lot about the business of manufacturing commercial business signs. In an art contest in elementary school, entries by the boy won both the first and the third prizes. As a young child, he spent a summer in Mexico City, where he visited art museums and otherwise was exposed to the art and
culture of Mexico. At the age of 14, Jiménez was shot in his left eye with a BB gun. Eventually he lost all sight in that eye. At the age of 16, he made two 10-foot-tall roosters for a chain of drive-in restaurants. Also at 16 years of age, he wrecked his old car. A couple of years later, he bought another old car that had a smashed front-end. He repaired it himself, using fiberglass, and that gave him some experience with the material that he would later use for many of his sculptures.

Jiménez, Sr. encouraged his son to study architecture in college—something that the father considered to be much more practical than art. Jiménez, Jr. did that (although he had misgivings), until during his senior year at the University of Texas in Austin, when he met Vicky Balcou, an art major. Jiménez changed his major to art, and, as a result, his father’s stopped speaking to him for several years. Much later, Jiménez said, “My dad was really a frustrated artist who became a sign painter.” Jiménez graduated from the University of Texas in 1964. Shortly thereafter he went to Mexico City to do graduate study in art at the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico.

Jiménez married Vicky Balcou in 1965. They lived in El Paso, and he taught art to students on the nearby Ysleta Indian Reservation. One of Jiménez’s friends was planning a trip to Canada, and he decided to accompany him. In Idaho, the friend fell asleep at the wheel of the van, and the vehicle left the road and rolled several times. Jiménez was thrown through the windshield, and he suffered two crushed vertebrae. The doctors predicted that he would never walk again and that he would never be able to father another child. They were wrong on both counts.
After their daughter, Elisa Victoria Jiménez, was born, the family moved to Austin, where Jiménez found a job as a janitor. During that period, he also painted a few murals in Austin, including one for the University of Texas’s School of Engineering, and one at a local Pizza Hut.

Jiménez decided that he needed to move to New York City to get his artwork noticed, and he did move there in 1966. The plan was for Vicky and Elisa to later join him in New York, but the couple divorced instead. In New York, Jiménez went to the state employment office. Since he could speak Spanish, they sent him to the Lower East Side, where he was employed to recruit children for the Head Start program. He also became an apprentice to artist Seymour Lipton. Jiménez later said: “What I learned most from Seymour Lipton was how to be an artist, the way he functioned in society. I came out of a situation where I didn’t even know how to become an artist.”

Jiménez repeatedly showed slides of his artwork to New York gallery employees, but without success. Finally he employed an unusual tactic, and it led directly to his first big break in New York. He visited the Castelli Gallery but found it empty. Then he took three of his sculptures and placed them in the gallery without permission. When the gallery director, Juan Karp, saw the sculptures, he was very impressed. Karp referred Jiménez to the John Graham Gallery, which was a good match. In 1969, that gallery scheduled a one-man show of Jiménez’s work. His parents flew to New York to celebrate the opening of the show with him. The gallery also presented another one-man show of the artist’s work the following year. Jiménez was able to quit his job and devote his time to working on Progress, a series of fiberglass sculptures about the winning of the West, but with a twist that suggested that much of the conventional wisdom about how the West was won were simply myths. His sculpture
Vaquero pays homage to the fact that Mexican vaqueros were the forerunners of American cowboys.\textsuperscript{58}

Jiménez built his reputation as a sculptor in New York and on the East Coast, but before long he found New York and his spacious studio too small for the size of his sculptures.\textsuperscript{59} At one point, he bought a house in Maine.\textsuperscript{60}

Jiménez came to believe that museums and galleries were not the proper context for his massive sculptures, and that the proper setting for them was outdoors, in public display.\textsuperscript{61} He desired larger audiences for his work than just the people who visited museums and galleries.\textsuperscript{62} To make his works of art available to a vast audience, Jiménez made the sculptures much larger than life-size and arranged to have them exhibited in public places; he also used lithography to reproduce his drawings and paintings so that they would be accessible and available to a large number of people.\textsuperscript{63} El Paso gallery owner Adair Margo said of Jiménez, “He wanted his pieces to be where people enjoyed them and loved them.”\textsuperscript{64}

In 1971, Jiménez visited one of the collectors of his art, Donald Anderson, an oilman in Roswell, New Mexico.\textsuperscript{65} Anderson persistently offered to underwrite Jiménez’s move to Roswell and his maintenance there, where he could make huge pieces of sculpture.\textsuperscript{66} Jiménez just wanted the chance to make the pieces, and he told Anderson that he (Anderson) could keep them.\textsuperscript{67} Jiménez returned to New York, loaded up his pick-up truck, and moved to Roswell.\textsuperscript{68} He lived there for six years and produced his Progress series of sculptures.\textsuperscript{69}

In 1974, Jiménez had a one-man art exhibition at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston, a first for him in an art museum.\textsuperscript{70} Later he found an old abandoned two-story adobe schoolhouse that had a stone foundation; it had been built by the Works Progress Administration
Jiménez was not averse to controversy; in fact, he felt that controversy about art was a good and positive thing. “The purpose of art is to create dialogue,” he said. Some viewers of Jiménez’s artworks experienced epiphany, and others reacted with outrage; Jiménez considered both responses to be equally valid.

In 1984, Jiménez went to a New Jersey bronze foundry to have some castings made. There he met sculptor Susan Brockman, who was working at the foundry. They began dating. Susan had been making plaster casts of friends to use in her sculptures, so eventually she asked Jiménez to let her make a plaster cast of him. She later said: “I ended up casting him in the bathtub, and he stuck to the bottom. We ended up sitting there for eight hours and kind of bonded.” They married on August 24, 1985, in Susan’s mother’s garden in Illinois. The couple moved to El Paso but made weekly trips to Jiménez’s studio in Hondo, New Mexico. They eventually moved into the old schoolhouse. Jiménez and Susan had three children: Luis Adan Jiménez, Juan Orion Jiménez, and Sarah Alicia Xochil Jiménez.

On Tuesday, June 13, 2006, Jiménez and two employees in his Hondo, New Mexico, studio were moving one of the three pieces of his 32-foot tall sculpture Blue Mustang (which had been commissioned for the Denver International Airport) with a hoist when it slipped and fell, pinning Jiménez against a steel support. The large piece of the sculpture severed an artery in his leg, and he bled to death, probably very quickly. He was transported to the Lincoln County Medical Center in Ruidoso, where he was pronounced dead. Tragically and ironically, Jiménez was killed by one of his own works of art. Susan, Luis’s widow, said, “He was a man who couldn’t quit working and it was the work that eventually took his life.” New Mexico’s...
governor ordered that flags around the state be flown at half-mast on Thursday, June 15, and Friday, June 16, in honor of Luis Jiménez.90

Jiménez’s artwork has been described a violent, dominant, raw, and passionate.91 He often utilized high-gloss, urethane-coated fiberglass and airplane paint to produce his huge sculptures.92 Jiménez’s use of fiberglass as early as the 1960s helped to make that material an acceptable art medium.93

An article in Texas Monthly says that Jiménez was “far and away the leading Hispanic sculptor in the country (the U. S.).94 A later article in the same magazine says of Jiménez, “he has become one of the busiest and most popular sculptors in America.”95 Stuart Ashman, the secretary of the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs, said that Jiménez was “the most important Chicano artist in the United States.”96

When Luis was asked to briefly summarize his thoughts on life for his biographical entry in the Marquis Who’s Who in America books, he said: “I am a traditional artist in the sense that I give form to my culture’s icons. I work with folk sources; the popular culture and mythology, and a popular material: fiberglass, shiny finishes, metal flake, and at times with neon and illuminated. In the past the important icons were religious, now they are secular.”97

Rudolfo Anaya, writer and professor emeritus of history at the University of New Mexico, said: “The kind of medium he [Jiménez] used shocked the art world at first. It was called outlandish and garish, but it spoke not only to Hispanics but to the world. In the coming years there will be a school of Luis Jiménez art.”98 More than a decade before Luis’s death, Professor Anya also said of him: “Luis Jiménez, in his work, celebrates the vitality of life. . .
What a gift it has been to us for this talented artist to reflect on the soul of our region. He gives meaning to our existence and history.99


Luis Jiménez’s masterful sculpture Man on Fire became part of the collection of the Smithsonian Institution in 1979.101 Also, a casting of his sculpture Vaquero stands outside an entrance to the Smithsonian.102 His sculpture Sod Buster is located outdoors in Fargo, North Dakota.103 A large number of sculptures in various places around the nation bear witness to his spectacular talent.104 Jiménez’s hand-colored lithograph Self-Portrait # 6 is a work that testifies to Luis’s superb skill in art forms other than sculpture.105

On the day that Jiménez died, El Paso art gallery owner Adair Margo said: “I think Luis shared this border region with the world. Those images will continue to live on. You look at the images he left us, you realize he was a voice that mattered, that gave form to this region and
communicated it with people. He was a man of just incredible talent, but he also had great generosity of spirit.”

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1 Texas Birth Index, 1903-1997, Name: Luis Alfonso Jiménez.
5 Marvel.
7 Congdon and Hallmark, p. 122.
8 Marvel.
20 Ennis.
21 Marvel.
23 Congdon and Hallmark, p. 122.
24 Marvel.
31 Congdon and Hallmark, p. 122.
32 Keller, et al., p. 42.
33 Marvel.

Stewart.

Ibid.

Belcher.

Stewart.

Belcher.


Stewart.


Texas Birth Index, 1903-1997.

Robert J. Duncan
Texas Birth Index, 1903-1997

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Source Information:

Description:
This database is an index to over 15 million births recorded in the State of Texas, USA, between 1903 and 1997. Information available in this index includes: child's name, sex, birth date, and birth county. Some records may also include: names of both parents.
"Luis Jiménez, in his work, celebrates the vitality of life. . . . Jiménez es un hijo de la frontera; he knows its people and the landscape. It is the transformation of these people into art that is his most important contribution to the art of this vast region which stretches between Mexico and the United States. . . . His subject matter utilizes the popular images of the cultura del norte, and a large part of it is depicted and transformed in the rough and tumble world of la frontera. He is also a son of el norte, and so he uses its materials and explores its emerging, popular myths. The tension, and attraction, of Jiménez's work is that he always creates within the space of his two worlds, the Mexican and the American. He constantly shows us the irony of the two forces which repel, while showing us glimpses of the synthesis he seeks. . . . What a gift it has been to us for this talented artist to reflect on the soul of our region. He gives meaning to our existence and history."

Rudolfo Anaya (passage chosen by the artist), "A View from La Frontera," Man on Fire: Luis Jiménez (The Albuquerque Museum, 1994), pp. 1, 3, 6

Luis Jiménez was born in Texas to parents who had emigrated from Mexico to the United States; he would later dedicate his 1989 sculpture Border Crossing to his father, who had entered the country illegally. The elder Jiménez was a neon sign designer in El Paso, and Luis worked with him as a youth. His experience working in the neon shop and his fascination with U.S. car culture would both become major influences on his art career. Jiménez studied architecture at the University of Texas, Austin (UTA), and also took art courses in which he first created sculptures with wood, steel, and fiberglass, choosing the latter because of its association with U.S. popular culture. He subsequently became one of the artists who made fiberglass an acceptable medium in the 1960s. In 1964 Jiménez received his B.S. in art from UTA, and he continued his studies at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México in Mexico City. In 1966 he moved to New York City and worked as an assistant to sculptor Seymour Lipton. Jiménez began to exhibit his art while in New York and in 1972 moved to New Mexico to focus on creating public sculptures, even as he maintained his diverse output of drawings, prints, and lithographs.

Drawing on his early experiences, Jiménez creates works that come from a border perspective, one that draws upon the hybridity bred by culture clashes. Often socially and politically informed, his works speak not only in regional terms, those germane to the southwestern United States, but to broader, more global issues as well. They exhibit a profoundly Chicano aesthetic and sensibility, one that is informed by Mexican and Mexican American traditions, North American popular culture, Chicano cultural icons, and images and themes unique to the Southwest. Death, sexuality, and the struggle of the common people are frequent themes. Inspired by authors who write in an autobiographical style, Jiménez creates works that function as personal narrative yet are also able to make statements about culture in more global terms. His use of bold colors and lines, a legacy from his father's work as a neon sign maker,

El buen pastor (The Good Shepherd: Profile of a Drug Smuggler), 1999, lithograph, 41.5" x 29.5" © Luis Jiménez. Collection of El Paso Museum of Art; gift of Marcel and Ellie Bourgon
Luis Jiménez  
(b. 1940)  
Mexican-American Sculptor

At the age of six, Jiménez began helping his father in his sign business. His father, a Mexican immigrant, worked as a carpenter before starting his own business, which makes huge neon signs for shopping centers and Las Vegas hotels. One of Jiménez’s first projects was a white concrete and neon polar bear created for a dry cleaner; when he was sixteen, he made two ten-foot roosters for a chain of drive-in restaurants (Beardsley and Livingston 190).

Jiménez’s fiberglass sculptures reflect his Mexican heritage, his father’s occupation, his personal history, and his love of popular culture, especially the low rider, a customized vehicle with hydraulic jacks that allow it to be lowered closer to the ground. Born in El Paso, Texas, Jiménez studied architecture and art at the University of Texas, Austin, earning his B.A. degree in 1964. After graduation, a scholarship from the National University of Mexico enabled him to study in Mexico, where he strengthened his pride in his Mexican heritage. Shortly after that, he moved to New York City, where he stayed for five years. ("Biographies" 319; Beardsley and Livingston 190).

The story of how Jiménez got his first big break in New York is so striking that it is told and retold. After repeatedly showing slides to gallery personnel and receiving no strong response, he took three of his sculptures to the Castelli Gallery. Finding it empty, he boldly placed his work in the gallery space. When Juan Karp, the gallery director, saw the sculptures, he was impressed, and suggested Jiménez try the Graham Gallery. This tip resulted in solo exhibitions in 1969 and 1970. His early subjects include a motorcycle rider, a sunbather with a magazine over his head, and a female barfly posed as the Statue of Liberty.
Luis Jiménez

In spite of the 1969 and 1970 exhibitions, economic success eluded Jiménez in New York, and in 1971 he moved to Roswell, New Mexico, where he spent six years. Here he produced his _Progress_ sculptures, which are large depictions of southwestern images (Beardsley and Livingston 193).

In 1974 Jiménez had his first one-person museum exhibition at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston. Reflecting on this exhibition, Benito Huerta offered reasons why it was so important:

For one, the work was ambitious in scale and content, and dynamic in its use of materials and color, with an exciting mix of popular culture and high art. Secondly, this unique, flashy smorgasbord of pop imagery had been created by a Chicano from El Paso, instead of the usual mainstream artist from New York or Los Angeles. This one-person exhibition in Houston of Jiménez’s work established him as an important role model for people in and outside of the Latino community. (7)

What is so different about Jiménez’s sculpture is that while it appeals to museum audiences, it is also public art that easily appeals to the general population, and can be successfully displayed in public spaces (Hickey 22). While Jiménez claims that he has no specific agenda, he also clearly states that he makes his sculptures primarily for the Chicano working class. There is a certain violence to much of his work; it is also part kitsch, part stereotype, and part historical revisionism (Mitchell 100). His sculptures depict cultural narratives, folklife, and historical information as seen by an insider—a Mexican-American perspective.

One of Jiménez’s most powerful pieces is his ten-foot 1989 sculpture _Cruzando el Río Bravo_ (Border Crossing), which is dedicated to his father and his paternal grandmother, who in 1924 entered the United States illegally. Depicting a man carrying on his shoulders a woman who holds a small child, it is made of a urethane-coated fiberglass that seems still wet. One image seems to flow into another, giving the viewer the idea of family connectedness. The crossing is clearly a struggle (Mitchell 100). In his earlier piece _Man on Fire_ (1969), a red-orange, oversized burning man, with long hair flowing to the side, reflects on both historical and contemporary themes. It pays homage to José Clemente Orozco’s fresco that depicts the Aztec leader Cuauhtémoc, and it also refers to Vietnamese monks who set themselves on fire to protest the war in Vietnam (Shields 140).

Jiménez’s sculpture _Vaquero_ (1977), now in the collection of the National Museum of American Art, receives prominent display because it is such an important symbol. Elizabeth Broun, director of the NMAA, observed: “We believe this _Vaquero_ sculpture makes many points that are key to our program: that American art began in the Hispanic Southwest, that Latinos are the most rapidly growing segment of the population, that the
Accident kills creator of plaza's 'Lagartos'

El Paso Times (TX) - Tuesday, June 13, 2006

Author: Daniel Borunda / El Paso Times

Luis Jimenez, the El Paso native whose fiberglass sculptures made him an internationally prominent artist, was killed Tuesday morning in a freak accident in his art studio in Hondo, N.M., authorities said.

Jimenez, 65, was the most famous artist to come out of El Paso, with his work recognized from barrios to President Bush's ranch home near Crawford, Texas.

Around 11:50 a.m. Tuesday, Jimenez and two of his employees were moving a large statue piece with a hoist when the piece got loose, struck Jimenez and pinned him to a steel beam at Jimenez Studios, Lincoln County Sheriff R.E. "Rick" Virden said in a news release.

Jimenez received a severe leg injury and died at Lincoln County Medical Center in nearby Ruidoso.

The death of Jimenez created a shock as it spread by word of mouth through the arts community in El Paso, where Jimenez's "Vaquero" and "Plaza de Los Lagartos" sculptures have become civic landmarks.

Jimenez was a major figure in Chicano art and a pioneer in public art. His vibrant fiberglass sculptures are found in parks from Albuquerque to Fargo, N.D., home of "The Sodbuster" statue.

Last week, the Cleveland Plain Dealer newspaper reported he was working on a Cleveland Firefighters Memorial that was to be ready by the fall. The statue was supposed to be finished by the end of 2004, but the date was pushed back in part because Jimenez had suffered two heart attacks.

"He was one of the most original artists on the planet," said Becky Duval Reese, the former director of the El Paso Museum of Art. Jimenez's "Vaquero" -- a 20-foot-tall statue of a Mexican cowboy on a bucking horse -- stands in front of the museum.

Jimenez's work often reflected his border and Southwestern roots. He often said he was inspired by his sign-maker father, a Mexican immigrant.

"I have a way of looking at the world that is somewhat unique, that is not maybe totally mainstream," Jimenez said in a 1995 interview with the El Paso Times. "I would hope that I've helped people have insights into the world we are living in."

Art gallery owner Adair Margo said Jimenez will live on in his work, including the "Texas Waltz" lithograph purchased by first lady Laura Bush that is now at the Bush ranch home.

"I think Luis shared this border region with the world. Those images will continue to live on," Margo said. "You look at the images he left us, you realize he was a voice that mattered, that gave form to this region and communicated it with people. He was a man of just incredible talent, but he also had great generosity of spirit."

Daniel Borunda may be reached at dborunda@elpasotimes.com; 546-6102.

El Paso Times reporter Adriana M. Chávez contributed to this report.

Section: Local
Record Number: 3933922
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His sculpture is nothing less than a revisionist history of the American West.
THE SEVENTIES HAD JUST BEGUN, and El Paso native Luis Jimenez had already realized the dream of every Texas artist of his generation: making it in New York. Arriving there in 1966 with a stubbornly contrarian aesthetic--outspoken, neon-hued figurative sculpture in an era of mute minimalist abstraction--this UT-educated son of an illegal immigrant had hustled his way into a couple of critically praised one-man shows at a prominent New York gallery, doing well enough to quit his day job and buy a house in Maine. But in 1972, in a turnabout seemingly as improbable as his success, Jimenez came home.

"I realized I was reaching what I thought was a very limited audience--the gallery and museum world," recalls Jimenez, who is 58. "It's not like having the work out in public. And I wanted to move out in public." Working in a hangarlike studio in a former Works Progress Administration schoolhouse near Hondo, New Mexico (about three hours north of El Paso), Jimenez has done just that, moving his art into the public arena with an ambition and audacity unmatched by any American artist in the past two decades. From El Paso's San Jacinto Plaza to a California border crossing to the main street of Fargo, North Dakota, Jimenez's high-gloss, urethane-coated fiberglass monuments have challenged his audiences to take a fresh look at their history and myths.

For a public that has progressed from classical bronzes of all-American icons to steel-and-marble corporate minimalism with little more than a yawn, a Jimenez can be an epiphany or, at times, an...
Jimenez, Luis Alfonso Jr. | Marquis Who Was Wh... - Credo Reference

Basic Search

Search Marquis Who Was Who in America 1895-present

Jimenez, Luis Alfonso Jr. | sculptor

Mailing address: Home and Office PO Box 7, Hondo, NM 88336-0007

Born: July 30, 1940 El Paso Tex.

Gender: M

Education: B.S. U. Tex. 1964; Postgrad. Ciudad U. 1964

Family: Son of Luis Alfonso and Alicia (Franco) J.; m. Susan Brockman; children: Elies Victoria, Luis Adan, Juan


Related Resources

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