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Seattle Center celebrates Mexico's Day of the Dead

At the Seattle Center this weekend, upstairs inside Center House, a ravishing display of Mexican art along the hallways leads to a room that is both cave-like and bursting with color. The display is part of the two-day Day of the Dead celebration at the center.

By **Dominic Gates**
Seattle Times staff reporter

At Seattle Center this weekend, upstairs inside Center House, a ravishing display of Mexican art along the hallways leads to a room that is both cave-like and bursting with color.

The darkened room is lined with ornate Day of the Dead altars, in celebration of the Mexican festival. Tiers of shelves decorated with colorful paper display a profusion of breads, fruit, glowing candles, vases of yellow and orange flowers, and photos of the dead.

Some of the altars are bedecked in the distinctive styles of different Mexican regions: Oaxaca, Michoacán and Azteca.

Others are dedicated to individuals, including an altar honoring John T. Williams, the First Nations carver who recently was fatally shot on the street by a Seattle police officer.

Another is dedicated to Roberto Maestas, a founder of the Beacon Hill Latino center El Centro de La Raza, who died last month.

Downstairs, in the main hall of the Center House, a large altar has a revolutionary theme. This year is the 200th anniversary of Mexican independence from Spain and the 100th anniversary of the Mexican Revolution that brought democracy to the country.

A portrait of Emiliano Zapata, a leader of the revolution, is at the center of the altar. To the right of that, a smaller display honors Ernesto "Che" Guevara and includes a cigar and trinkets associated with the Argentine Marxist revolutionary.

Nearby, visitors to Seattle Center watched traditional Mexican huapango music, dancing and singing. Booths sold freshly baked Día de Muertos (Day of the Dead) breads and posters of Mexican art.

Hundreds of kids decorated skulls, composed mostly of sugar, or made their own posters. Many had their faces painted as skeletons.

The master of ceremonies for the stage performances was Luis Ortega, 23, a recent University of Washington graduate. In an interview, Ortega called Día de Muertos "one of our most beautiful traditions."

Although the Day of the Dead shares the imagery of death with Halloween, the two festivals have little else in



enlarge ALAN BERNER / THE SEATTLE TIMES
Joseph Esquivel, 12, of Mount Vernon, leaves a dressing room and heads for the stage to open the Día de Muertos program with Ameyatltonal, a traditional Aztec dance group. Black paint across his eyes marked the deaths of his grandfather and great-grandmother this year.

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common.

In n if largely in jest.

Bu eath. It's a religious festival imbued with
Ca stianization of the country by Europeans.

In t family tradition of the year.

"Life and death go hand in hand. You don't live without dying. You don't die without living," said Ortega. "Día de Muertos is a celebration of family, a celebration to honor and remember our loved ones who have passed away. And it's a reminder of our mortality: how beautiful life is and also how short."

Isaac Hernández Ruiz, a Mexican artist who directs the Seattle Center's Día de Muertos two-day celebration, said that in some parts of Mexico, in addition to putting up altars in their homes to deceased relatives and eating special foods, families gather in cemeteries and spend the night eating, drinking and singing.

"In Día de Muertos, culture, tradition, history and art all come together," said Ruiz.

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