



Vol. 1 Issue 8 DECEMBER 2020

CENTENNIAL MUSEUM
AND CHIHUAHUAN DESERT GARDENS
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

Celebrating Life in the Chihuahuan Desert



Welcome

Daniel Carey-Whalen, Director

To say that 2020 was a tough year would be a huge understatement. The list of disasters that have occurred is long, from the impeachment of the President to a divisive election, from massive wildfires in Australia and the western United States to a record-setting Atlantic Hurricane season, from George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery to the continued detention of migrant children and the expulsion of migrants without due process. And the list goes on and on...

Yet, we, as a people, will persevere. Vaccines are being discussed by the FDA at this very moment and the mere thought of 2021 is giving people hope. This month's newsletter reflects on the past, looks to our future, and enables us to embrace our present moment. Through our collaborations with Dr. Gina Nuñez and Professor Jessica Tolbert, the Centennial Museum celebrates the amazing work of UTEP students as they struggle through this difficult and uncertain time. Our Botanical Curator, Kevin Floyd, reminds us to plant and tend our gardens now so they will give us solace and food to sustain us through the winter. Curator of Collections, Sam Winer delights us with some of the wonderful foods we can look forward to as we celebrate this unusual Holiday season. And our Collecting 2020 project looks back on this unbalanced and at times, catastrophic year, yet it also includes the work of UTEP students who remind us to help others in need.

Happy Holidays from all of us at the Centennial Museum and Chihuahuan Desert Gardens. Be safe and stay healthy. We look forward to seeing people in 2021, hopefully in person.

All the best,

Daniel Carey-Whalen



The fruits of Tracy's hawthorne (*Crataegus tracyi*) are a favorite of birds

Museum Hours of Operation:

We are temporarily closed to the public until further notice. Please visit our [website](#) for more information.

- CENTENNIAL MUSEUM
Monday through Saturday
10:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M.
- CHIHUAHUAN
DESERT GARDENS
Open every day
Dawn to Dusk
- LHAKHANG
Every Wednesday and 1st
Saturday of the Month
11:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M.





Collecting 2020

Daniel Carey-Whalen, Director

Starting in January of 2021, the Centennial Museum will commence a new collecting project called Collecting 2020. As the UTEP community and the El Paso region attempts to put 2020 behind us, the Museum will start gathering oral histories and artifacts connected with how UTEP students, faculty, and staff have been affected by this incomprehensible year. We will focus on three main areas: 1) COVID-19, 2) Social justice issues, and 3) Election 2020.



Variety of Masks

The first area that we are collecting will focus on the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only will we collect masks, test kits, and promotional health literature, but we also want to understand the pandemic and quarantine's effect on work and school. Additionally, we want to hear about the "silver linings," for example, drive-by celebrations, virtual graduations, and increased communication with loved ones throughout the globe.

2020 was already a notable year with the global pandemic, however, in the United States the health crisis has shown a spotlight on the vast racial, ethnic, and economic disparities that plague our country. No event has illuminated this more than the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin and the protests that spread across the country. El Pasoans also took to the streets in protest and we want to know how the UTEP community was involved. We are looking to collect oral histories and protest posters related to the Black Lives Matter movement, but also from the social justice movements happening in El Paso, from the detention and separation of immigrant children and families at the border, to environmental justice in southside neighborhoods, and the debate over the controversial Oñate statue.

Lastly, the Centennial Museum is looking to collect mailers, bumper stickers, and other campaign literature regarding the national, state, and local 2020 elections. More El Pasoans voted this November than in any previous election. We want to capture the artifacts and oral histories surrounding this historic election. How were UTEP students, faculty, and staff involved in this process? How did the pandemic and social unrest affect people's level of engagement? These are the types of questions the staff are asking as we move forward in our collecting efforts.

The Centennial Museum and Chihuahuan Desert Gardens has not actively collected artifacts for over five years. We are moving forward with this initiative with the help of UTEP's Institute for Oral History and the C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department at the UTEP library. We are starting with UTEP students, faculty, and staff, yet since our mission encompasses the entire region, this project may have room to grow. Please contact us at centennialmuseum@utep.edu if you are interested in learning more about this project or have something to donate to the museum.

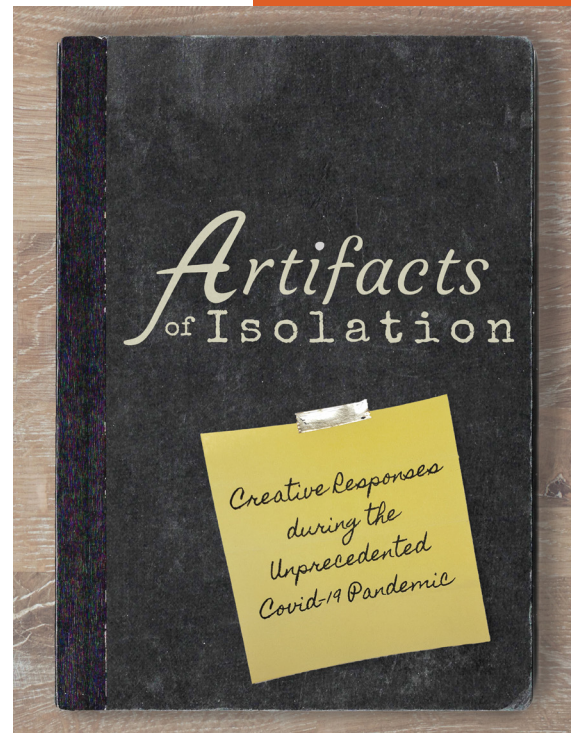


Artifacts of Isolation: Creative Responses During the Unprecedented Covid-19 Pandemic

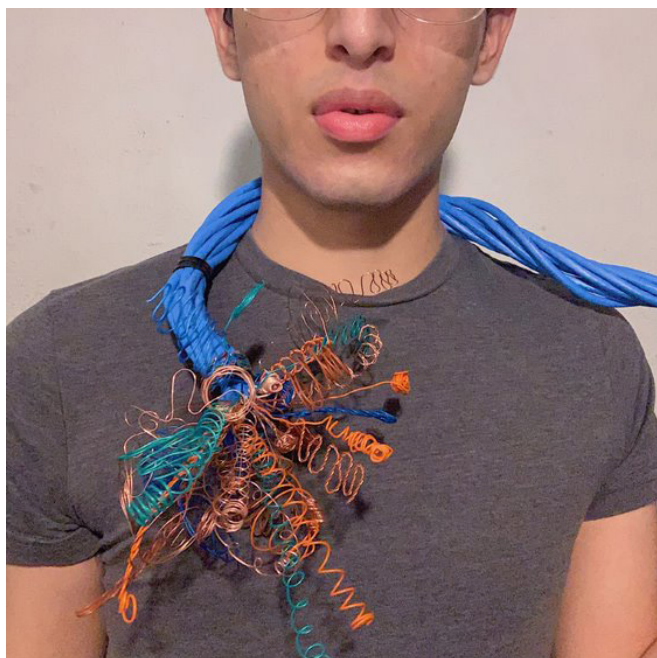
Claudia Ley, Education Curator

Just as many museum exhibitions, program and projects remain in limbo, the Centennial Museum also faces the uncertainty of when it will be safe to open again to the public. Up until a year ago, we were planning a jewelry exhibition with Jess Tolbert, Assistant Professor of Art, and Head of the Jewelry + Metals program. Before going on winter break, we had our first walkthrough of the museum's permanent galleries and saw jewelry from our collections. Immediately, the "big idea" came to us of having her students work on a "future artifact."

In March of 2020, the metals students were scheduled for a guided tour of the third-floor galleries and permanent Collections. As part of their final semester project, they were to create a wearable or functional piece that serves a particular purpose in their current time and place. Along with their jewelry and tool-making techniques, we scheduled academic lectures so students could learn more about our region's natural history and culture. Things were going according to plan until the sudden news that Spring Break would be extended an extra week, and then the City of El Paso found itself under a mandatory two week shut down. Just a couple of weeks into learning about how serious this new virus was, it became evident that we would be part of a major historical shift.



Catalog cover for
Artifacts of Isolation:
Creative Responses
During Unprecedented
Covid-19 Pandemic
(2020)



Responsible Radius by Alex Saldierna (2020),
for Artifacts of Isolation

Suddenly the "big idea" had changed, and Jess adapted the students' project into something that could be done from home. Working with a collaborator at San Diego State University, they prompted students with a series of projects under the title *Artifacts of Isolation*. With limited tools and supplies, students also documented their learning and working experience in response to the pandemic through field notes and journaling. Also working from home, we went from planning an exhibition to learning about catalog design and overseeing the publication of *Artifacts of Isolation*:



Backyard by Diane Morales (2020), for Artifacts of Isolation

Creative Responses During Unprecedented Times of Covid-19.

In this catalog we document two projects that were created by students between March and May of 2020. *From Home: Jewelry from the Spaces We Occupy* became a project that challenged students to use everyday objects in the spaces they occupy to create jewelry. While many students took a more contemporary approach in material use, using telephone wire, for example to create a neckpiece, or experimenting with heat and sugar to sculpt a ring. Others took what could be perceived as a more ancestral approach, such as utilizing natural materials around them, in ways like what we find in the Museum's exhibition cases. The project, *Responsible Radius: Measuring Distance*

Wearable enabled the students to think about their personal space. Through wearable objects that convey what is a "third space," these pieces say a lot about how the artist was able to occupy a space and/or interact with others while wearing a creative ornament. A knitted 6-foot tapestry for two allows a form of interaction, while a pair of brightly fabricated wings that extend six feet each clearly warn others to keep a distance.

While all the pieces, like their own stories, are unique and personal to the artist, no two are alike. On behalf of the Centennial Museum, we would like to extend our gratitude to Professor Jess Tolbert and the students for allowing us the opportunity to create history alongside them. Without their stories and objects that serve as symbols of resilience this project would not have been possible. We look forward to the publication of *Artifacts of Isolation: Creative Responses During Unprecedented Times of Covid-19* by the end of the year and making it available to the public by the beginning of 2021. Finally, we would also like to thank all frontline workers on campus from those who have made it possible for us to have onsite testing, to our facilities workers, especially David Perez, who has kept our museum safe even while most of us continue to work from home.

Wishing you and your loved ones a safe and happy holiday. Please share our newsletter with others and follow us on social media to see previews of the catalog!



Black dalea (*Dalea frutescens*) is a fall-blooming low shrub in the legume family. It is drought tolerant and a favorite food for bees.

black dalea. This is also a time that some of our winter annuals germinate. We have seen a few of the Mexican gold poppies sprout, and the spectacle pod is growing well. How well these winter plants will do depends both on how cold it gets and how much rain we will receive. Last winter was wetter than usual, and we were rewarded with a spectacular display of poppies both in the gardens and in northeast El Paso near the Archeology Museum. The forecast is for a drier than usual winter unfortunately, but we can all keep our fingers crossed for some good storms.

Late fall and winter can also be a good time to grow some of your own veggies at home. Leafy greens like spinach, kale, and lettuce, broccoli, onions and garlic, and carrots are all plants that are frost-hardy and grow well throughout the winter. We are getting to be a bit late to grow plants from seeds, but if you can find starters in the local nurseries now is the time to plant. The Master Gardeners' [website](#) has

Winter Gardening

Kevin Floyd, Botanical Curator

As I write this in mid-November, the high temperatures have been in the low 80s and there has not been a risk of frost since the cold snap in late October. The extended fall weather makes it a bit difficult to think about the cold weather ahead, but the temperatures will dip, and many plants will become dormant for the winter. In the Chihuahuan Desert Gardens, we have seen our Tracy's hawthorn and Rio Grande cottonwood turn fall colors. Other plants, like the common hops vine and black cherry, have already lost their leaves.

Despite this switch into dormancy by some of the plants, others have been showing a fall resurgence like the sand globemallow and



Mexican golden poppies (*Eschscholzia californica* ssp. *mexicana*) are a favorite sign of spring in the gardens. We start providing extra irrigation by hand in the fall to encourage germination of the seeds. Seedlings started to appear in early November.



Spectacle pod (*Dimorphocarpa wislizeni*) is one of the earliest spring blooming annuals in the garden. Many of the seeds germinated when the temperatures dropped, and the plants are making nice rosettes now.



Golden currant (*Ribes aureum*) is another great shrub for the garden. In addition to the yellow and red leaves in the fall, it has fragrant yellow flowers in the early spring and edible fruits.

several articles about [cool season gardening](#). Growing your own greens is easy and rewarding, and can be done in containers if you do not have a yard.

This is also a good time to sow wildflower seeds. In nature, many plants are dropping their seeds now, and will be ready to germinate once the temperatures increase in the spring. Some seeds even require a chilling period before they will germinate, and you can either spread them now or put them in the refrigerator to have them ready for spring planting. Your work now will hopefully pay off with a beautiful yard of spring flowers. It is not easy to find seeds for Chihuahuan Desert native plants, but some good places to try are [Native Seeds SEARCH](#), [Plants of the Southwest](#), and [Native American Seed](#).

Although winter is a slower time in the garden, there is always work to do and plants to enjoy.



Rio Grande cottonwoods (*Populus deltoides ssp. wislizeni*) often turn a brilliant yellow in the fall. Our tree has some good color, but the freeze at the end of October damaged some of the leaves, causing them to just turn a crispy brown.



Tracy's hawthorne (*Crataegus tracyi*) has some of the best fall foliage in the garden, along with bright red fruits. It can grow to be a small tree.



Origins of Recipes

Samantha Winer, Curator

I grew up in El Paso and took for granted the rich culinary traditions that exist in the Borderlands; it wasn't until my family moved away that I realized how lucky I was. Now, as holiday season approaches one of the things I am most excited for is all the food. Not only is it tasty, but food helps tell the history of a place, and the food of the Southwest is a great history teacher.

One of the most popular dishes served during the holiday season is tamales. Everyone has their favorite tamale spot in town; lists appear in social media as to what restaurant has the best (Gussies, by the way), but tamales also have a long culinary history. Dating back to 7,000 BCE, tamales were made by the Indigenous cultures of Latin America. In fact, the word "tamale" is a corruption of the word *tamal*, from the Nahuatl language. An important component of tamales, corn served a pivotal role in the religions of Indigenous civilizations. Many cultures, such as the Mexican, Olmec, Toltec, and Mayans had creation stories that prominently featured corn. The Mexica would offer tamales to their gods during festivals. After the invasion of Mexico and South America, tamales would continue to play an important role during the holidays. Tamales are still seen as a special treat because of the immense work it takes to prepare them, but the outcome is extremely delicious.



in 1989, biscochitos became the official cookie for New Mexico



Champurrado is made with ground corn, known as masa, and chocolate

Corn can be found in another popular culinary tradition in the Borderlands, *champurrado*. This hot beverage is made with ground corn, known as *masa*, and chocolate. The drink's origins are traced to Mexico and Mayan cultures. *Atole*, *masa* with water, was a popular everyday drink, and with the addition of chocolate, it was viewed as a magical elixir served only for special occasions. The Spanish took many foods back to Europe, such as *champurrado*. A little too bitter for the Spanish, they added milk and sugar to the



Dating back to 7,000 BCE, tamales were made by the Indigenous cultures of Latin America

drink to make it palatable.

When I left the Southwest, I was able to taste different culinary traditions from other regions of the country. I was introduced to bread pudding and *canolois*, but no matter where I go and how many desserts I am lucky to sample, when I bite into a *biscochito* I am reminded of home. Several origin stories exist recounting the history of *biscochitos*. One source states that the cookies, originally known as *mantecados*, meaning butter or lard, came from Spain. The colonists of *Nuevo de Santa Fe*, now Santa Fe, took the popular *mantecados* cookies and added anise, creating a subtle, spicy and sweet cookie. In 1989, *Biscochitos* became the official cookie of New Mexico.

The border region is known for its blending of cultures, even some cultures that might seem out of place such as Judaism. The first Jewish people came to New Spain during the 16th century. Known as *conversos*, these Jews were forced to convert to Catholicism during the Reconquest of Spain and the Inquisition in the latter part of the 15th century. Many of the Jews who outwardly converted to Christianity still practiced Judaism and would be known as Crypto-Jews. Other *conversos* fully integrated into New Spain society and embraced Catholicism. Ashkenazi Jews (eastern European Jews) beginning in the mid 1800's emigrated to Mexico and the American Southwest to escape religious persecution in Europe.



Gelfite fish is a popular Ashkenazi food, made from ground, deboned fish

Over the years, Jewish traditions have merged with Mexican culture to create some surprising and delicious traditions. *Gelfite* fish, a popular Ashkenazi food, made from ground, deboned fish, receives a makeover in Mexico. It is common to see it served with hot red chili sauce in Mexican-Jewish households. During the holiday of Hanukkah, it is traditional to eat foods that are fried in oil, and *churros* have become popular accompaniment to the celebrations. Brisket, a popular cut of meat in both Jewish and Mexican cultures, can be found in tacos or served fresh out of the oven. And speaking from personal experience, adding salsa to a *latke*, a potato pancake, is an amazing way to kick it up a notch.

Many of the foods that we eat during the holidays are a wonderful blending of cultures, history, and traditions. What story does your favorite holiday food tell?



Dr. Nuñez's Class

Amy Briones, Curatorial Assistant

Some families may not be fortunate this holiday season. The pandemic has affected many people this year and food insecurity is one of many problems. UTEP's Dr. Guillermina Gina Núñez-Mchiri's student Karla Martinez decided to address this issue by putting together an infographic of food pantries in El Paso. It is a collaborative effort to address food insecurity in our region. We hope this can be shared with everyone in need and educate people on what is happening in our region. [Click here to view the infographic](#)

The Centennial Museum is partnering with Women and Gender Studies Director Dr. Guillermina G Núñez- Mchiri's students to share resources they have gathered with the public in collaboration with our Collecting 2020 project. Some examples are cooking recipes, tips for gardening at home, and artistic expressions that have come out of this pandemic. Below is a poem written by Luke Soto expressing his thoughts on Thanksgiving.

Not So Thanksgiving by Luke Soto

In the fall of 1621
Settlers arrived on the shores
of the new land
Not long ago was this adventure begun
Natives came with a welcoming hand

A cold twist in the fate of man
A village burning in the distance
Men, women, and children ran
While everything they knew was wiped
from existence

500 Wampanoags lie in the
blood-soaked dirt
A cheap victory the pilgrims had won
All for nothing, just one man hurt
A feast held for the deed they had done

An event hidden over the years
Shadowed by an annual Thanksgiving
feast
So many forgotten tears
Long buried, is the real beast

For most, a day of giving thanks
For some, a day of sorrow
Remember the broken ranks
Natives fought with only bow and arrow

Recall the day for the good
Spare a moment for the forgotten
Most would go back if we could
To change a part of history, that is so
rotten



35.2
MILLION

LIVED IN FOOD
INSECURE HOMES IN
THE U.S 2019. [7]

5.3
MILLION

CHILDREN LIVED IN FOOD
INSECURE HOMES IN 2019
ACCORDING TO THE USDA. [7]

