

NARRATIVE TEXTS

Consuelo “Chelo” González Amezcua, Artist, 1903-1975

Untutored in art, Consuelo “Chelo” González Amezcua produced fantastical, intuitive imagery with an unlikely instrument—a ballpoint pen. “I was always a dreamer, and I am still painting my dream visions,” she explained.¹

Chelo was born in Piedras Negras, Mexico. Her family immigrated to Del Rio, Texas, when she was ten. In the 1930s she wrote to the President of Mexico requesting funding to study at the Academy of San Carlos. He arranged for a scholarship, but the death of her father impelled Chelo to cancel her enrollment. She lived in Del Rio for the rest of her life.



Chelo worked selling candy at the local Kress 5 & 10 Cent store. Her supervisor recalled that “managers of the store were always getting after Chelo for stretching out her hourly wages to arrange the candy in figures and other pictures.”² During summers Chelo traveled to Mexico for artistic inspiration. She began creating what she termed “filigree art” after the intricate Mexican jewelry that she loved to wear. These were intricate ink drawings of tiny lines within curving patterns. She drew upon Mayan, Aztec, and Egyptian history to create fluid images of women, hands, birds, flowers, and architectural elements like columns and arches.

For Chelo art was a sacred process. Upon completing a piece, she would meditate in thankfulness, sometimes inscribing words of explanation or poetry on the reverse side.³ In her later years, she experimented with color in her drawings. Artistic recognition was slow in coming, but in 1968 Chelo was honored with a one-person show in the McNay Art Museum in San Antonio, followed by exhibitions in Mexico and the East Coast.

Her drawings never lost their mystical, other-world quality. They mean different things to different people, and each viewer takes away a personal interpretation of them.

Quotations

Chelo’s work is of no single school, for it encompasses and transcends them all.—Dr. Amy Freeman Lee, humanist, artist, and lecturer⁴

Soy americana de descendencia mexicana, y por doquiera que voy se lleva con dignidad el nombre de los Estados Unidos y de México. I am an American of Mexican descent, and wherever I go, I take with me the dignity of the United States and Mexico.—Chelo González Amezcua⁵

Photos

Caption: “Chelo Amezcua, c. 1930, and her ‘Queen of Sheba.’” Both from the Anthony Petullo Collection of Self-Taught and Outsider Art.

Endnotes

¹ Quote is from “Consuelo González Amezcua,” *Smithsonian American Art Museum*, http://americanart.si.edu/search/artist_bio.cfm?StartRow=1&ID=5910 (May 5, 2005). Other sources for biographical information in this article are “Consuelo ‘Chelo’ González Amezcua,” *The Anthony Petullo Collection of Self-Taught and Outsider Art*, <http://www.petulloartcollection.com/artistprofile.asp?refArtistID=7> (May 4, 2005); María-Cristina García, “González Amezcua, Consuelo,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/GG/fgohg.html> (April 26, 2005); and “Chelo González Amezcua, *Webb Gallery*, <http://www.webbartgallery.com/artist/chelo/chelo.html> (May 4, 2005).

² Quote is from “Chelo González Amezcua,” *Webb Gallery*, online.

³ “Consuelo ‘Chelo’ González Amezcua,” *The Anthony Petullo Collection of Self-Taught and Outsider Art*, online; and “González Amezcua, Consuelo,” *The Handbook of Texas Online*.

⁴ Quoted in “Consuelo ‘Chelo’ González Amezcua,” *The Anthony Petullo Collection of Self-Taught and Outsider Art*, online.

⁵ Quoted in “González Amezcua, Consuelo,” *The Handbook of Texas Online*.