

A close-up photograph of numerous white sugar skulls, a traditional Mexican confection for Día de los Muertos. The skulls are arranged on a dark, textured surface, possibly a wooden table. Each skull is intricately shaped and has a small hole in the center of its forehead. The lighting is warm, highlighting the texture of the sugar.

BRECKENRIDGE CREATIVE ARTS  
**RESOURCE GUIDE**

FOR  
**DIA DE LOS MUERTOS**



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# PAPEL PICADO

in the Fuqua Livery Stable



**Colorful paper banners, called papel picado** (Spanish for "perforated paper") can be found both indoors and outside during Dia de Los Muertos. Usually made of tissue paper, the cut banners are hung together like a string of flags. Designs include skeletons, skulls, crosses and tombstones. Some artists use intricate designs that take hours to create. Because of their fragile nature, papel picado also symbolize the temporality of life.

**The tradition** of papel picado can be traced to pre-Columbian times when papermaking thrived throughout Mesoamerica. The bark of the amate tree, a type of fig tree, was used to make a rich colored brown or beige paper. Cut-paper figures were used in ceremonies and represented human and animal spirits. Today, papel picado are made with tissue paper or plastic. Some of the best papel picado is made in the small village of San Salvaldo Huixcolotla in Puebla, Mexico, where artists create paper and plastic decorations for Dia de los Muertos, Mexican Independence Day (September 16th), and Christmas.

Cut paper designs are not unique to Mexico. **Examples from other cultures** include: German scherenschnitte, Polish wycinanki, Chinese hua yang, Japanese kirigami, and French silhouettes.

# PAPEL FLORES

in the Fuqua Livery Stable



**Papel Flores (Paper Flowers):** Mexican paper flowers are world-renown for their meticulous craftsmanship and vivid color palette.

As they are made of tissue paper, when real flowers are not available, papel flores provide an imperishable and affordable decoration for Dia de los Muertos and other holidays.

**Marigolds:** Dating back to Mesoamerica, marigolds are believed to be the flowers of the dead, and were used to decorate Aztec tombs. Mexicans believe the spirits of the dead visit the living during Dia de los Muertos, and marigolds guide these spirits to their altars with their vibrant colors and scent. Marigolds (and flowers in general) also represent the fragility of life.

# COMMUNITY ALTAR

## in the Randall Barn

El Día de los Muertos is one of the most important and anticipated events in the Mexican calendar. Starting in the summer, preparations for altars (ofrendas) begin and money is set aside for celebratory expenses. Ofrendas are created for individual ancestors, and cemeteries are cleaned and repaired in anticipation of visitors.



### The following items are commonly part of an altar:

Water: satiates thirst of the spirit and represents purity and a source of life.

Salt: carries purifying elements and is a symbol of wisdom. It can also act as an invitation to the altar.

Calaveras de azucar (sugar skulls): sugar and salt represent the sweet and salty aspects of life.

Flowers: represent love and the sun. Cempasúchitl (or marigolds) are traditionally offered.

Pan de muertos (or bread of the dead) and other food to feed the spirits.

Incense: to create smells that are pleasing to the deceased.

Papel picado (or paper banners) for decoration

# SUGAR SKULLS

in the Fuqua Livery Stable



An icon associated with Dia de los Muertos is the skull ([\*calavera\*](#)). Artists create skull [\*masks\*](#) ([\*calacas\*](#)) and foods (such as chocolate and sugar) are molded into skull shapes and inscribed with the name of the deceased or the recipient of the treat. Sugar skulls are gifted to both the living and the dead, and are often placed on altars as an edible decoration.

# FACE PAINTING

in the Quandary Antiques Cabin



Another popular tradition associated with Dia de los Muertos, is the art of face painting, providing an alternative to the skull mask.

The face is first painted white and then intricate and colorful designs are applied. Both adults and children enjoy this tradition.

Donning a mask or painting one's face is an opportunity to overcome the fear of death and connect with a darker side of the self. In the words of Dr. Renee Fajardo, director of the MSU Denver program, masks and face painting offer a way to "transform yourself spiritually and mentally from walking in this world to a different place in the universe." Traditionally, prior to dance and prayer ceremonies, Aztec dancers painted their bodies to strengthen their connection to the spirit realm.