

Camp Bosworth: *Plata o Plomo*

The Museum of Contemporary Art in Tucson is pleased to present Camp Bosworth: *Plata o Plomo*. Born in Galveston, Texas, and currently living and working in Marfa, Bosworth draws much of his inspiration from the richly diverse culture inherent in a border state. Diverging traditions and histories, the trope of the Western, border tensions, the war on drugs, the figure of the Narco (or drug lord), gun laws, cartel wars—all form the scope of influence surrounding the artist's practice. Initially trained as a painter, Bosworth creates monumental wood sculptures that examine the image of the Narco, representation of narco-culture in Corridos, and our collective fascination with, in the artist's words, "the lives of outlaws and the rich, or anyone living a more than normal life."

Corridos are narrative songs of love, honor, revolution, corruption, betrayal, triumph, struggle, defeat and determination told from the populist point of view. Incorporating oral history and cultural myth the art form employs turns of phrase and sometimes satire to relate the news of the moment and memorialize current events: a kind of musical newspaper. The lyrics are sober, realistic and often tragic, and reflect local perspectives. Similar to Western ballads about outlaws, narco-corridos detail the exploits of drug traffickers. Beginning as the voice of the people, the musical form has grown into a multi-million dollar industry as a mainstay on the Latin music charts.

El Rey de los Corridos, Rosalino "Chalino" Sanchez, the exhibition's titular figure, grew up in humble circumstances in Sinaloa, the Mexican state south of Sonora. Tragedy and poverty marked his early life, and, in part, prompted him to cross the border to California for work. There, his musical talents were recognized and his reputation as an authentic voice for the people began to grow. It is a tradition for smugglers to commission corridos about their escapades, and Chalino was a favorite choice; he sang in the language of the street, dressed in jeans, boots and cowboy hat, and always carried a pistol: a native son.

For this exhibition, Camp Bosworth has crafted a visual corrido. Creating oversized icons of the narcotraficante—pistol, tequila, spurs, bling jewelry—has allowed him, like an anthropologist, to observe, document and investigate life in Northern Mexico at the start of the 21st century. He acknowledges the ongoing folklore of Mexican history and popular arts within the culture of La Frontera by creating recurring and enduring images from wood. He employs techniques derived from Mexican artisanal wood carving, bas-relief, metal working and jewelry making traditions. Isolating the trappings of narco-culture demystifies them, allowing them to be seen apart from their cultural milieu, and diffuses their charge as associated symbols of power and machismo. They begin to move into the realm of Pop. Increased in scale, the stereotypical status objects lose some of their connotations of menace and domination and make way for an appreciation of craft, skill and beauty.

Through this body of work, Bosworth deliberates challenging questions unique to the border region: corruption, violence, murder, poverty and lawlessness wrought by the drug cartels. He further hopes to encourage dialogue as an important tool for change. "I don't think I'm romanticizing Narco culture or power; I am working through it. It does not mean that I sympathize with these types of characters. Art is an inherent form of communication and my work stimulates conversations about border issues, the Narcos, and the war on drugs."