

Visual Narratives of Spirituality and Migration

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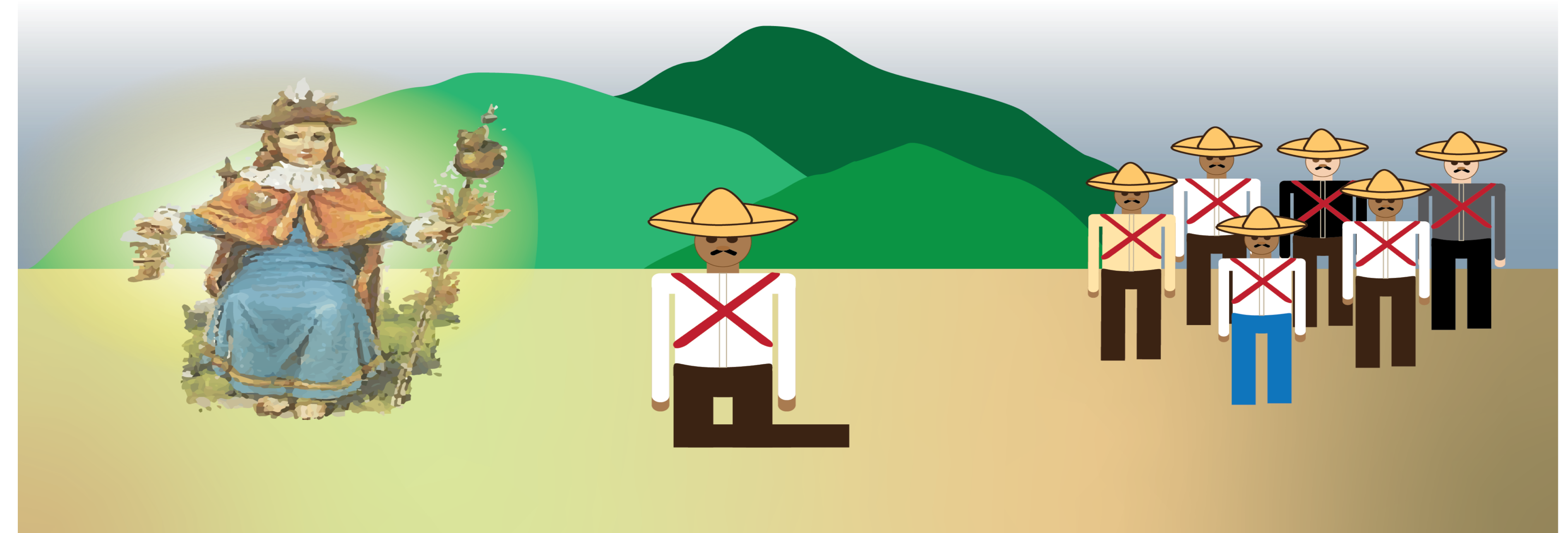


INTRODUCTION

This project researches cultural productions that reveal connections between visual spiritual practices and migration from Latin America—in my study primarily from Mexico—to the US. By looking at ex-votive paintings of popular spirituality, I researched narratives that represent migrant experiences and that treat questions of faith and popular beliefs.

Ex-Votive paintings have been used as a way to honor or show appreciation to a saint or divinity for centuries in the faith of Catholicism. In Spanish, ex-votive paintings are known as either an “ex-voto” or a “retablo” and can be found outside of places of worship. The idea behind the creation of an ex-votive painting is to narrate a miracle that occurred due to a saint or divinity. Ex-votive paintings are created as a way to show gratitude and can vary in topics including health, relationships, and migration. The paintings typically include an illustration of the saint or divinity alongside a representation of the problem the divinity helped with. Typically at the bottom, there will be a prayer in which the worshiper will tell of their miracle.

EX-VOTIVE FOR THE HOLY INFANT OF ATOCHA-- 1910



Doy gracias al Sto. Niño de Atocha, porque gracias a el me dio la fuerza para huir de la corrupción del estado. En mis cuatro semanas de viaje el santo niño me dio la esperanza para continuar mi viaje hasta llegar a Texas donde he podido comenzar una nueva vida.

Historical Context:

- The Mexican Revolution begins causing many Mexicans to flee to the United States to avoid violence.

Interpretation:

- A miner thanks the Holy Infant of Atocha for allowing him and his family to arrive safely in Texas with his family and finding a job.

EX-VOTIVE FOR JESUS CHRIST--1850



Gracias a ti señor, hijo de Dios, por ayudar a mi hijo a llegar a California. Fue un viaje muy largo pero me ha escrito y dice que ha comenzado a trabajar buscando oro y que es mucho mas feliz.

Historical Context:

- Two years prior to 1850, the United States and Mexico sign the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ending the Mexican-American war and establishing a new border.
- In 1849, gold is discovered in California causing mass migration into California and surrounding areas.

Interpretation:

- Mother thanking Jesus Christ for allowing her son to reach California safely from Juarez and begging a new happy life.

EX-VOTIVE FOR OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE-- 1942



Hoy damos gracias a la virgencita morena por darnos fe y fuerza para continuar con el largo viaje de Jalisco hasta a Washington. Los tres hemos podido encontrar trabajo en campos de fresas para ayudar a pagar los gastos medicos de mamá.

Historical Context:

- The United States and Mexico sign an agreement known as the Bracero Program.
- The agreement would allow Mexican manual laborers (braceros) to work in the United States with decent working conditions and a minimum wage causing an influx in migration.

Interpretation:

- Three brothers show gratitude to Our Lady of Guadalupe for allowing them to survive the long journey from Jalisco to Washington. They hoped to reach Washington where they would begin their own American Dream; allowing them to pay the medical bills for their sick mother.