

>> From the Library of Congress in Washington DC.

>> This is Francisco Macías at the Library of Congress. Late September will mark the 12th year that book lovers of all ages have gathered in Washington DC to celebrate the written word at the Library of Congress National Book Festival. The festival which is free and open to the public will last two days this year, Saturday September 22nd, and Sunday, September 23rd, 2012. The festival will take place between 9th and 14th Streets on the National Mall come rain or shine. Hours will be from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. on Saturday the 22nd and from noon to 5:30 p.m. on Sunday the 23rd. For more details visit www.loc.gov/bookfest. And now it is my pleasure to introduce the award winning Mexican born illustrator and artist Rafael López whose work is the featured promotional piece for this year's National Book Festival commemorative poster. Rafael's work is said to conjure imagery of Mexican street life, Mexican surrealism, and myths and [inaudible] which are a proverbial and idiomatic expressions that stem from a fusion of local color and wisdom. His illustrations for Book Fiesta by Pat Mora won him the 2010 Pura Belpré illustrator award which is granted by the Association for Library Service to Children; a division of the American Library Association. Each year the award is presented to a Hispanic writer and illustrator whose work best represents, supports, and celebrates the culture experience of Latinos in an exceptional work of literature for children and youth. In 2011 he created stamps for the United States Postal Service that featured and commemorated Latin music icons Celia Cruz, Carlos Gardel, Carmen Miranda, Tito Puente, and Selena. His art work which includes graphic elements has reached international clients like Amnesty International, Apple, HarperCollins, IBM, Intel, Los Angeles Times, the Grammy Awards, and The World Wild Life Fund among others. He balances his time between his studios and San Miguel de Allende a colonial city in the Mexican State of Guanajuato and loft in downtown San Diego where he lives alongside his wife and son. Without further ado Rafael thank you so much for joining us.

>> Thank you, Francisco. That was quite an introduction by the way, thank you.

>> You're welcome. You're welcome. So the first question is; as a Mexican born artist whose work has been featured in numerous non Mexican venues, tell me, Rafael, how do you define your art in the global sense and then within the context of a cultural or national identity?

>> I believe that living in -- having the opportunity to live in San Miguel de Allende sometime during the year and being such an International colony of people from different parts of the world has exposed me to different influences. When I walk the streets of San Miguel there's so much richness culturally and visually for me you just can't avoid. So with my camera through the last ten years I have been able to record and in my own brain being able to remember all these memories and passages that I've seen every day and, you know, eventually they do filter in through the work I do every day it's something that really happens naturally. So although this is done in the middle of Central Mexico the influences are very much internationally there is so much going on here that I believe that it has really filtered down into my

work. And there's a little bit of a purpose to actually make it appealing to -- in a very world -- to have a world audience I believe that's the case. As far as being proud of my heritage I do, I feel that Mexico has offered me incredible opportunities to have this richness and love for color and texture and the fact that my adoptive country, the United States, has accepted it and really welcomes that I think is just fantastic though. So it's sort of like a gift that I bring to me into my audience, which you know lately has become more international.

>> Very good. Thank you. And the next question is; what artists if any, past or contemporary has inspired or influenced your work and how?

>> You know originally I believed the Mona Lisa's of the 1930s, the 1920s, 30s and 40s of Mexico, you know, doing all those school visits to all those museums in Mexico and being amazed by the size and the strength and the message of those murals, you know, when you're a seven year old you're very impressed by them and some of those images stayed with me for a long time. So I believe that the early mural is like [inaudible] where my first influences and then I started discovering other people that were not so well-known like someone like [inaudible] and I loved the way he explored and really exploited all those Mexican textures and the way he introduced them into his paintings and it's almost like what I do now. If you are familiar with my work it's very, very, textural; so those would be the first influences. After that there were many, many people from all over the world, someone would be someone like Ben Shahn artist from New York from the 1930s, I love the way he corrupts things and he does this very incredible I would say just design of his work is just amazing and so yeah the influences come from different parts of the world.

>> Great. Great. And speaking further on inspiration then; at the moment you set out to illustrate a work of literature where does your inspiration come from? Is it from the subject or the lyrical elements of the words or from someplace else?

>> That's a great question, Francisco, and I think that I like to see my approach to solving the visual part of the book, the way a filmmaker or a movie maker does it. In a way you have to find this flow of things and it's actually very challenging when you have to do 30 some paintings making any sense at all. You know, I wasn't used to do doing that and before I was doing any children's book I was only working and focusing all my attention on one painting but when you have to this continuity in beginning it was very scary. And then I realized that it didn't have to be, you can have this continuity, you can tell this story, I wanted my paintings each one of them to stand on their own I didn't want them to feel like it was just part of a section of something. If someone just grabbed one piece and pulled it out of the series it could stand on its own and tell you a story and that's where the challenge lies for me now, you know, because I want every painting to be so unique that I think sometimes I try to hard but in the beginning I just need to relax and say, you know, remember this whole thing just needs to make sense for a book.

>> That's very interesting. And I guess the next one would be, there are many aspiring artists and illustrators out there and often times during

times of economic hardship it may seem too easy to say that art is the thing that is nice to have, but not really a necessity; what would you say to them to feed their dream and what would you say to those who believe they can live without art?

>> Great question, Francisco. Boy, you are putting me on the spot on this one, right. You know I think that is very subjective, but I truly believe that art in any way whether it is music, painting, photography, sculpture, music, you know, without a doubt it's rich in our lives. Just look at any city where the art thing is very strong such as San Francisco or New York or Washington or even San Miguel de Allende there's such richness and -- it's just the cultural thing really enriches the society, the culture, you can see it, I mean it's imminent it's right in front of you. So it's hard for me to tell you why this happens I just believe that a city that offers his citizens and a school and education that offer that richness to their kids is opening many more doors and many more possibilities. Case in point, I don't think every person is built in the same way and their brains are wired the same way. Good example personally would be my son; my son is someone who is very artistically oriented, very visually oriented, is someone that undoubtedly is going to be someone in the visual arts in some way. So when you don't have those opportunities for kids like him what's going to happen to them. You know, his brain doesn't work the way a kid that is good with numbers or words or math or anything like that does so well he wouldn't do it in the same way. So we were depriving that opportunity to people when you are taking away art. And I guess it's a very personal thing for me. It just pretty much overall enriches a life of the society, of the town, of the city, of the country, and the world.

>> And I think you --

>> -- does that make any sense?

>> Absolutely. And I think you brought up a very good point which is a good sedge way for our next question. It's often said that poets and other artists don't become they simply are; do you think this is so? If so at what age did you know you were an artist? If not what were the most salient choices that paved your way to become one?

>> I was very fortunate to have these amazing parents that were architects both and they were the kind of parents that whatever I wanted to do they would be 100 percent behind me; they supported me on anything I wanted to do. I always liked to draw, always. I knew that I had a very difficult time just like my son with mathematics and things like that. So the fact that they encouraged me was a big difference and, you know, when some of these kids don't have the same opportunities for whatever reason I think that the rest of us our obligation is for us to go out there into the schools is something that I do a lot, is to participate in school programs and give presentations and talk to kids. And anyone that wants to approach me after that I'm ready to be a tutor and a mentor and let them know that it's possible. Whether you're born with it or not, you know, that's something that's very debatable, I'm not sure, I mean I know that I have the ability, I can see my kid with an amazing ability, but I went to school with people that really struggle with drawing, you could

see that there was no natural knack for drawing, however, toward the end of the school it was the willing to try something different and I think that's the key to the whole thing and some of these friends of mine became just amazing artists. So, you know, there's enough for presenting kids on both ends.

>> Very good. And one last question. In contemplating your art I can't help but marvel at the wide array of colors in your palette. I really love the bold colors in your works including those that are in your photographs. So pardon me of the next question is one of really self indulgent curiosity; what is your favorite color and how is it represented in your work?

>> Purple. I love purple. I don't know why, I just love purple and whatever goes with purple I'm happy with that second color. But there's something about purple there's certain purples here in the textiles of Mexico that just blow me away. And I have found a store here that sells that exact same purple, you know, a big jar, and so I take it back with me to the states and I try not to -- I really close that lid so well so it doesn't dry up because I love that purple. So, yeah, I mean the colors of the city, the colors of the market, the flowers, the food, everything is just filtered down into my work, you know, I just can't avoid those rich colors. It's funny when I take photos of San Miguel and I send them back to my friends on the web they keep looking at it going like, are those real colors, is that really a color there or what do you do, did you change it, and it's true, you know, those are the colors that I find here in my native country.

>> Very good. Thank you. We've been hearing from the award winning Mexican born artist and illustrator Rafael Lopez who will appear at the Library of Congress National Book Festival on Sunday, September 23rd for a presentation from 4:35 to 5:20 p.m. an artist signing and autograph session is scheduled to take place between 1:30 and 2:30 or later at the special programs pavilion. Rafael, thank you very much.

>> Thank you, Francisco, it was a pleasure talking to you.

>> Likewise.

>> This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress, visit us at loc.gov.