

## **Title: NICHOS**

### **Grade: 8<sup>th</sup>**

**Materials:** Cardboard, foamcore, newspaper, white paper, papier mache paste, masking tape, acrylic paint, sketchbooks and pencils, objects brought in by students.

**Goals:** 1) Understand and appreciate the concept of folk art. 2) Understand and describe the term Nicho or Retablo. 3) Understand and define armature and papier mache. 4) Understand the concept of symbols in art. 5) Create a personal nicho/retablo that reflects some aspect of the student's personality.

**History:** In Mexican and South American cultures, small, decorated boxes called "Nichos" are commonly found in homes and public places, displayed on walls or pedestals. A **nicho** is an object of Latin American folk art. Made from wood or tin and often painted with bright colors, they provide a stage-like setting for an object or collection of objects that have great significance. Nichos are made from mixed media and traditionally combine elements from Roman Catholicism and popular culture. Most commonly functioning as an altar for a religious icon, a Nicho can also serve as a memorial to a loved one or as a reminder of an important event. Nichos may be referred to as retablos.

**Show Powerpoint:** Use the notes to ask questions about specific pieces.

### HOW TO MAKE A NICHOS

1. Decide what your subject will be. Make a list of important events from your life, favorite book characters, family and friends. Will your nicho showcase a character from a book? Will it be a religious figure? Will it be in memory of a loved one? Or will it be a reminder of an important event?
2. Look at examples of Mexican Nichos on the web. Google "Nichos." Some are humorous, some are religious, and materials vary from tooled metal to recycled materials and found objects. Explain that students may need to bring in an object from home to place inside their nicho. Some objects might be action figures, parts of a toy, an old cell phone, a part of a collection, etc. Any object can be used.
3. Discuss the ways that a very ordinary object can become something of great value and importance when placed in a particular setting.
4. Use the template to create a box from cardboard, tagboard, foamcore, or another material.
5. Measure the material for the front piece. You will need a window slightly larger than the box you made in step one. Cut out the opening using scissors. Leave the front piece as a rectangle or create cut outs, rounded corners, scalloped or zig-zag edges. Tape or glue onto the box.
6. Add 3 layers of papier mache to the entire box, front, back, and inside.

7. Paint the front piece as desired with acrylic paint. All surfaces should be painted, outside and inside.
8. While the paint is drying, assemble the character or object to be placed in the box. Model the character with clay or create it out of paper mache. To simplify it, use paper cut outs or found objects. The bird in the example was created out of wire and clay.
9. Decorate the outside of the box to further describe the character. Add painted wood shapes, cut outs, or model shapes from other materials. Use a push pin to create holes in the box, then attach string or wire pieces to string beads (optional). Add a hanger to the back of the piece. Glue the character into the Nicho as the final step.

### **Options**

- Wrap the box with foil and tool patterns and designs into it
- Use newspaper and magazine clippings, tissue papers and other collage elements instead of, or along with paint.
- Use a larger or unusual shaped box.
- There are many ways to make this project more challenging for older students. Require them to create a full scene from a literary piece, or create a Nicho with multiple windows. Incorporate more sculptural elements, hinged doors or even add a light fixture.

Artists to check out:

Kurt Schwitters (collage artist)

Jasper Johns (collage artist/painter)

Google Keywords:

Nichos













