

# Jerri Allyn

**Artist:** Jerri Allyn

**Title:** Six Moons Over Oaxaca

**Date(s):** Fall 1994

**Physical Description:** 200 sets of 11 postcards (5 identical images in English and Spanish with 1 announcement), 6 1/2" x 4 1/2" folded, 6 1/2" x 30 3/4" unfolded, ; plus edition of 100 wrap-around "altar" covers (50 in English, 50 in Spanish), 6 3/4" x 19", with dried roses, wrapped in maroon tissue set in cardboard box.

**Distribution:** Fall 1994 & Spring 1995 in North America, Mexico and Europe via US Postal Service.

**Project Description:** The artist facilitated a bi-lingual printmaking exchange through the postal service between 12 artists in Manhattan, New York and Oaxaca, Mexico, culminating in exhibits in both cities coinciding with The Days of the Dead/Los Dias de los Mexico (October 31 and November 1, 1994 through January 7, 1995). The New York exhibit was accompanied by a 1-day symposium synthesizing artist discussions and research that reflected a comparative analysis of the philosophical underpinnings of the two countries' views on death, in addition to slide presentations about the work of artists dealing with premature death and the afterlife.

## Querido Sebers,

*... el papa de Filomena who died of internal troubles before it was ready to let her go.*

Alfredo and I were driving to see his family, hours from Oaxaca City, up in the Sierra. He told me I was deep into Mexico now. This was not a tourist exotic. Since his family had been half starving, when he was 13 he ran away to sharpen his survival skills on the streets of Mexico City. Now he visited Ella weekly (population maybe 500), to help his mother.

Two of Alfredo's sisters **died in their teens, one in childbirth, the second mysteriously.** Those deaths had been hard, but when his sick father **died recently in his lap.** Alfredo told me it was like he'd **lost an arm,** so greatly did he **mourn** him. Alfredo's family **buried** his father in the town tradition, and laid him on a lime case. As descendants of the Mexico religion, they filled his pine box with tortillas, beans, money, and all his possessions. Guided by a black dog, he reached those ruins on his **long and arduous journey** across a sun-drenched river to **Mielha, the Land of the Dead.** In procession, his coffin was carried to the **graveyard** by their fields. They dug his **resting place,** and as catholics, **mourning and prayed** for an additional nine days (perhaps he was **traveling to heaven,** while a **sand-painting** was created on his **burial mound,** another ancient tradition.

Part of the reason **Mexicans take death in stride** is that it is all around them - aside from the history of their **grandly monolithic death worshipping cultures** which would give them ample reason. About 75 years ago within industrialized countries, in most cases, the **hospitals and funeral parlor** took over the tasks of caring for the **terminally ill and burying the dead.** We accept **withering the process of dying, then death itself.** We learned to avoid even mention of the word. The recent use of **term and old plagues** have dashed the 20th century hope that medical research would eradicate sickness. Miracle drugs or technological advancements that have **extended life with machines** - but question the **quality of that life** if lived as a vegetable, for instance - have **tempered our desire to live forever,** or any funeral young.

Most of Mexico has not yet been afflicted these "luxuries." **Life,** worth of the border, is a marvelous reminder that the **Reaper** doesn't have to be grim, but eventually, he or she **always shows up.**

Alfredo had prepared me for the hardship of those still eking out a living as farmers on dry, red hills that were **stripped of man,** causing perpetual **hoped run-offs.** But he had not prepared me to meet his brother, Francisco, and Ella local, wanted to teach entrepreneurial workshops to replace water young farmers could not **make a living,** and asked Alfredo to open a community center with him. Alfredo thought he could teach kids **fabrics through story,** painting and regional songs on the guitar. But he wasn't sure he could work with Francisco, the one who may have **tried to kill his brother.**

Fidel, elected as a town representative, was responsible for getting electricity to Ella. Francisco had his own ideas and controversy around. When a meeting was arranged in Mexico City with government officials, Fidel was **bludgeoned nearly to death.** That was three years ago. **Fidel didn't die,** but he can no longer walk. He lives in a wheelchair and his mind is gone. His head visibly **bulged in.** He speaks of Francisco and others hearing him, but he also speaks nonsense. Nothing was very clear. A rumor still circulated that **Francisco tried to kill Fidel,** and the only thing for sure was that there were no strong arguments about electricity in Ella.

My mother's family were Mexican Indians, from **"the land of the conquistador,"** and Alfredo's family were Mexican Indians, from **"the land of the conquistador,"** but I remembered a frighteningly similar story. I had been visiting my grandmother's village, Palguera de Reina. We were going to climb this stunning white-capped mountain, and across the path my 75 year old aunt had taken to herd the cows when they were little. One of his **mothers** refused to go.

"You look at that mountain and see beauty?" The Uncle told me personally. "I'll see it as **clothing and hunger and hard work.** My mother went out regularly the same walk with only a **leaf of bread.** It took a whole day to reach the summit where our animals grazed. My steps to **take to along the way,** throwing, starting, and **warded to death** of the surface who hunched all night." There were many like the one I've heard that felt any **mechanical-remote device** against, and punishment village life.

She looked at the mountains, seen to her eyes. "One night my father never came home. My mother had to run out there, so she went out to search. It was a cold and rainy winter in the mountains. With so much fog, I couldn't see the head of her face. Running around for hours, eventually a rescue party found us both. My father was **dead.** There were rumors that he'd been **killed because of land disputes,** carried on for generations between different villages. It was devastating. The more right talk, too many to find. My sister and I, though young, had to work as industrial workers in another town, then went, and to the U.S.A. We cleaned people's houses and mailed another our monthly earnings. You see a **woman's work,** a beautiful life. I hate it." I see **clothing and hunger and hard work.** And I've not to think about it, but sometimes I see a **little murder,** too.

Alfredo and I were thoughtful and finally agreed it would be a good idea to bring a **crab of revenge.** Perhaps Francisco felt guilty and wanted to be something good for Ella. Alfredo wasn't ready to work with him on a child's program, but he liked the idea. Maybe he would get past his heart and his anger.

