

June 15, 2006

Luis Jimenez, Sculptor, Dies in an Accident at 65

By DAVID A. BELCHER

Luis Jimenez, a sculptor whose color-splashed images of swirling dancers, roughneck cowboys in motion and the working class made him a controversial and easily recognized international figure in the art world, died Tuesday at his studio in rural Hondo, N.M. He was 65.

The Lincoln County Sheriff's Office in Carrizozo, N.M., said he died in an industrial accident.

Mr. Jimenez was pronounced dead at the Lincoln County Medical Center in southern New Mexico, the Lincoln County Sheriff's Office said. He sustained injuries when one of three pieces from a 32-foot-high sculpture being moved from his studio came loose and pinned him against a steel support. The piece, commissioned by Denver International Airport, depicted a giant mustang horse and had been in development for nearly a decade, according to Jim Moore, former director of the Albuquerque Museum.

Mr. Jimenez's massive fiberglass objects, depicting Hispanic and Native American dancers, cowboys and barrio workers with contorted faces and neon-colored, spray-painted clothing, are displayed prominently in public places and museums across the Southwest and the country. His work has been featured at the [Art Institute of Chicago](#), the [Museum of Fine Arts](#) in Houston, the [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) and the [Whitney Museum of American Art](#).

The [Smithsonian Institution](#) in Washington, D.C., honored Mr. Jimenez's sculpture "Man on Fire" in 1979, when it became part of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American Art. The work, perhaps his best known, depicts a man in flames, and is based on the Aztec emperor Cuauhtémoc, who was burned alive by Spanish conquistadores. A casting of another of his sculptures, "Vaquero," which shows a bronco rider atop a shimmering, metallic-blue horse, sits outside the museum.

Mr. Jimenez was born in El Paso in 1940. His father owned an electric sign shop, which exposed Luis to spray painting and welding. He moved to New York in 1966, returned to New Mexico in the early 1970's and found success — and controversy — as a sculptor of outdoor objects, which are featured prominently around Albuquerque, including at the [University of New Mexico](#), in the neighborhood Martineztown and in the National Hispanic Cultural Center.

Jimenez drew major attention, positive and negative, in 1983, when neighbors in the Old Town district in Albuquerque objected to a sculpture depicting a Native American caressing a dying woman, saying that it resembled a rape. More recently, Mr. Jimenez completed a sculpture of firefighters for the city of Cleveland, and was putting the finishing touches

on the Denver International Airport piece, Mr. Moore said.

"At the height of Minimalism in the 1960's, he chose to do something out of fashion," Mr. Moore said. "His work contributed to the rise of Pop Art, but it was more a willingness to do something so overtly meaningful at first glance."

New Mexico's governor, [Bill Richardson](#), ordered flags around the state to be flown at half-staff today and Friday.

Rudolfo Anaya, professor emeritus of history at the University of New Mexico, said of Mr. Jimenez: "The kind of medium he used shocked the art world at first. It was first called outlandish and garish, but it spoke not only to Hispanics but to the world. In the coming years there will be a school of Luis Jimenez art."

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Luis Jimenez studied architecture and art at the University of Texas at Austin, receiving his B.F.A. degree in 1964. Following a brief stay in Mexico and six years in New York, he returned to the Southwest in the early 1970s. Although Jimenez is primarily a sculptor, he is also accomplished at color lithographs and colored-pencil drawings. He executes preparatory drawings to work out the conceptual and formal configurations of his sculptures, which are made of fiberglass cast in a mold, then painted and coated with epoxy. His New York sculptures, such as *Man on Fire*, [SAAM , 1979]. Jimenez taught art at an El Paso junior high school until he was temporarily paralyzed from the chest down in a car accident. Belcher, David A. "Luis Jimenez, Sculptor, Dies in an Accident at 65." *The New York Times*. June 14, 2006. <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/15/arts/design/15Jimenez.html>. That sculpture, which depicted a Hispanic cowboy on horseback firing a gun into the air, was originally installed in a park next to the City Hall of Houston in 1981, and for some reason, there were objections to it; the piece would later be moved to a more Hispanic area of town. On June 13, 2006, Luis Jimenez was working on a 32-foot tall sculpture of a rearing horse that was commissioned by the city of Denver when a large section of the sculpture fell on him and severed the carotid artery in his leg; he was pronounced dead later that day. **Artist Dies in Accident.** Work by Luis Jimenez Jr. can be found around Albuquerque. Here, "Fiesta Jarabe" sits outside Popejoy Hall on the UNM campus. More on Luis Jimenez Jr. from ABQNews Seeker blog by news editor Bruce Daniels here. Virtual gallery tour of Jimenez's work compiled by a Google images search here. Photos from this week's ABQjournal.com. Journal Photos. Jimenez suffered severe injuries to a leg in the accident, the release states. Doctors at Lincoln County Medical Center pronounced him dead. Born in 1940 in El Paso, Jimenez picked up welding and spray painting at his father's electric sign shop. In 1966, after studying in Mexico City with muralist Francisco Zuniga, Jimenez took his work to New York and found success as an artist. Luis Jimenez (Sculptor): his birthday, what he did before fame, his family life, fun trivia facts, popularity rankings, and more. He died as the result of an accident in his art studio: a portion of his large Blue Mustang sculpture crashed into his leg and ruptured an artery. Family Life. His artist and fashion designer daughter, Elisa Jimenez, competed on the Fourth Season of Project Runway. Associated With. He was greatly influenced by the work of the Mexican muralist Jose Clemente Orozco. Luis Jimenez Popularity.