Neo-Mexicanism refers to representational art made in Mexico between the mid-1980s to the early 1990s. Neo-Mexicanism uses popular Mexican symbols and seems to promote stereotypical ideas about Mexican identity at first glance. Created during a tumultuous time in Mexico’s history, the work actually critiques popular notions of what it means to be Mexican.

Use this exhibition guide to learn more about Neo-Mexicanism!
After the Mexican Revolution, a movement to establish a new identity took hold. The government endorsed Mexicanidad, a collection of experiences, styles and icons believed to be authentically and particularly Mexican.

This nationalist, post-Revolution identity rejected European standards and adopted objects and ideas related to the indigenous populations of Mexico. Artists like Diego Rivera and Francisco Zúñiga embraced this movement. They began depicting national heroes as well as peasants, and used patriotic symbols like the Mexican flag in their work. Traditional or popular arts and costumes became fashionable. While the purpose of this movement was to create a style and art Mexicans could call their own, it also resulted in objects and beliefs that many people believed stereotyped the Mexican experience.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Why would people think that Mexicanidad shows only a stereotype of Mexicans and their culture?
Neo-Mexicanism emerged in the mid-1980s, when a series of economic and natural disasters caused Mexicans to question the effectiveness of their government. In the face of these problems, they struggled with the nationalism still being promoted by the Mexican State.

Neo-Mexicanist artists responded to this crisis through their art. Because they borrowed symbols from Mexicanidad, the images appear to celebrate Mexican culture and identity. They included figures like revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata, images from Lotería (Mexican bingo) and representations of Aztec warriors in their work. They did not use these patriotic symbols triumphantly, however, but in an ironic and sometimes sinister way. The dark humor of the paintings undermines popular images, conveying the artist’s critique of the enthusiastic, unquestioning nationalism promoted by the government.

THINK ABOUT IT:
What types of circumstances or events make citizens feel disappointed in or ashamed of their country?

To learn more about the events in the 1980s that affected Mexican patriotism, scan the code or go to http://bit.ly/1xL8PhS
**Activity: Fan Grid**

**Nationalism** is defined as devotion and loyalty to one’s country. It is like being a fan of a specific nation or country. What are you devoted to? In the grid below, write in the names of the people, groups, teams or artists to whom you are loyal. Include a **symbol** or picture that could represent them.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sport or Athletic Team:</th>
<th>Musician, Artist, Band or Celebrity:</th>
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<tr>
<th>Country or Culture:</th>
<th>Other (Choose your own):</th>
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<th>What symbol did you use?</th>
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Along with nationalist symbols, Neo-Mexicanist artists also used popular images in their work. Some came from television, films, music or advertising. Others were taken from folk art or everyday objects.

Alejandro Colunga bases his paintings on popular stories with magical elements. He combines representations of indigenous deities with folk objects and beliefs to create mysterious works of art. He explores identity by investigating the stories and symbols passed on through Mexican culture.

Neo-Mexicanists also borrowed images from magazine advertisements and movie posters. October-Students Killed in Uprising transforms a magazine ad into a statement on a controversial event from modern Mexican history. Neo-Mexicanists compared propaganda and marketing techniques to the way the Mexican government spread the idea of a Mexican identity.

To compare some artworks created by Neo-Mexicanist artists to the original images that inspired them, scan the code or go to http://bit.ly/1n6J5Fy

Franco E. Méndez Calvillo (Mexico, b. 1948) October - Students Killed in Uprising From the series Los meses negros de Mexico / Black Months of Mexico, n.d. Collage, paint on mag. Advertisement, 10 1/2 in. x 10 3/4 in. (26.67 cm x 27.31 cm) Gift of Ann Janss M.2001.007
In establishing an identity that united all Mexicans, Mexicanidad produced stereotypes that not everyone agreed with. Neo-Mexicanist artists used their own experiences to challenge these stereotypes by telling their stories.

Nahum Zenil’s self-portraits explore Mexican male identity. Stereotypes of Mexican men describe them as ‘macho’, aggressive and fearless. Men are discouraged from showing ‘feminine’ qualities, like sensitivity or gentleness. All people are capable of acting in ways which reinforce or challenge stereotypes. Zenil uses humor to critique the limitations that machismo places on men. In Wedding Portrait, he shows himself as the various characters in a wedding party, including the bride, groom and flower girls. It reflects the complexity of his identity.

THINK ABOUT IT:
Have people ever made assumptions about you based on your age, gender or the way you dress? What have you done to challenge those stereotypes?
Super Identity Self-Portrait

Your **identity** is made up of characteristics that are unique to only you. What qualities do you have that set you apart from others? List those traits and then create your own superhero **identity** using symbols related to those characteristics.

**My Super Unique Identity**

**My Special Traits:**

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________
New Words

Critique: To talk about something, reflecting on both its good and bad parts.

Identity: Who someone is; the qualities which make up a person.

Irony: Satire or mockery of something or someone; the use of words or images to express an idea that is the opposite of its literal definition or meaning.

Mexicanidad: “Mexicanism,” an idea of what is Mexican as represented through objects, styles or ideas. Initially a post-Revolution movement, Mexicanidad rejected European ideas and embraced the indigenous origins of Mexico. The government promoted Mexicanidad through the commission of art works that reflected these post-Revolution values.

Mexican Revolution: An uprising that began in 1910 in order to abolish the corruption of the Porfirio Diaz dictatorship, which lasted 35 years. The revolution included governmental reform (through elections) and rural battles for land reform led by farmers and peasants. The violence that marked the revolution lasted into the early 1920s and overtook most of the country.

Movement: The activities by a group of people during a specific time, working to advance a particular cause or idea.

Nationalism: Devotion and loyalty to one’s country, often accompanied by the belief that one’s country is the best.

Neo-Mexicanism: Literally “new Mexicanism,” it refers to art from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s made by a specific group of artists. Neo-Mexicanism challenged fixed national and cultural identities.

Popular: Liked or appreciated by many people; an object or cultural expression which appeals to the general public. Popular culture or objects are often mass-produced and widely distributed.

Representational: Art that shows its subject in a recognizable, often realistic way.

Stereotype: An often unfair and untrue belief about all people who share a particular characteristic.

Symbol: A picture, color or object that suggests or stands in for an idea, belief or another object. For example, the bald eagle is recognized as a symbol of the United States.

Written by: Gabriela Martínez

Cover image:
Mónica Castillo (Mexico, b. 1951)
detail from El plato de Zapata / Zapata’s Dish, 1987
Oil on canvas
Courtesy of Nicholas Ingram