

Celebrations of the Dead: Bringing Culture to Life

In a small but intriguing art studio on the edge of campus, several students gather around a well-worn but sturdy worktable to talk about dead people.

It's not about murder mystery shows or the latest TikTok trend. These students are exploring the tradition of using retablos, or devotional art, as a way to honor and remember special people in their lives who have passed away. Slowly, the students get to work using pencils, paint, charcoal, and glue as they research, laugh, cry, and remember.

From soulful and somber to dynamic and colorful, people around the world have many different ways to pay tribute to loved ones who have died.

This month, Lee College will create space for everyone to experience a variety of diverse cultures and traditions during, "Celebrations of the Dead," Oct. 28-Dec. 3, at the Performing Arts Center gallery. The exhibit will take a closer look at artwork relating to Dia de los Muertos, All Hallows Eve and the Celtic festival of Samhain.

"We didn't call it 'Dia de las Muertos,' because we wanted to include all the cultures that honor the dead," said Elena Poirot, Lee College Visual and Performing Arts faculty member. "We want to encourage students to research all the history of the different celebrations and be more inclusive of each one."

In the spirit of inclusivity, several Lee College departments joined in on this unique platform to learn about global traditions alongside one another.

"It's a great opportunity for the college to include English, humanities, Spanish, and other departments, so everyone can be a part of something together. It's not just about having fun, but it's about learning the history of different cultures and working together all in one location," said Poirot.

The exhibit will kick off 1-4 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 28, at the Performing Arts Center with a free opening reception and workshop featuring traditional food, music, art, and traditional crafts for all ages.

People in the community are encouraged to be part of the exhibit by creating retablos to display at the art gallery. Retablos are typically made from a small piece of wood or metal, and they depict an image or symbol that pays homage to a special person or memory. Free art supplies to create a retablo are available at the Lee College art studio.

"You don't have to be an artist to create these retablos," said Poirot. "There are so many different ways to honor someone. There's no wrong way to do this."

Even for those who aren't interested in creating their own art, Poirot encourages everyone to stop by the come-and-go event on Oct. 28 to experience different cultures first-hand.

"Swing by and try something new, get something to eat, and learn about different cultures around the world," she said.

For more information about creating retablos or about the "Celebrations of the Dead" exhibit, contact Elena Poirot at 281.425.6485, or epoirot@lee.edu.