



Al Rendon waits to speak Sept. 21 for "La Cultura Trasciende Fronteras: A Personal Portrait of Tejanos and Mexicanos" at the Witte Museum.

Photo festival honors Rendon's body of work

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As part of the annual Fotoseptiembre International Photography Festival, the Witte Museum hosted the reception of "La Cultura Trasciende Fronteras: A Personal Portrait of Tejanos and Mexicanos" by San Antonian photographer Al Rendon Sept. 21.

A multimedia presentation included 20 years of documenting Hispanics such as iconic singer Selena.

Selena's original portrait was donated by Rendon to the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C.

"It's my favorite photo of Selena because she's so pensive and intense," Rendon said.

"In most photos you see of her, she's always smiling and having a great time, but she was a very serious musician and designer also," he said.

The first attraction of Witte's Focus Gallery displays performers involved with downtown's historical Alameda Theater, which was built in 1949 and still stands at 318 W. Houston St.

One of them is a portrait of flamenco guitarist Willie Champion with his wife and native flamenco dancer, Teresa.

"Big pioneers of flamenco music here in San Antonio, they're probably on their fourth generation of kids now that are learning flamenco and carrying out the tradition," said Rendon.

Next is Jorge Cortez, owner of Mi Tierra restaurant, in which famous figures like actor John Wayne and singer Gloria Estefan have dined.

Aside from proudly exposing Hispanic culture, the Cortez family was among the supporters for the Alameda Theater restoration and visionaries of today's Museo Alameda, a 40,000-square-foot Latino museum inaugurated on April 13, 2007, at 101 S. Santa Rosa.

Rendon said, "I photographed him (Cortez) in this big room they have with this beautiful mural that has all

the famous Mexican revolutionaries and artists," such as Emiliano Zapata, Frida Kahlo and former president of Mexico Venustiano Carranza.

Then there is singer Rosita Fernandez, with a painting of Jorge González Camerana in the background.

"San Antonio's First Lady of Song," who sang to Pope John Paul II in his 1987 visit to the city, passed away after heart surgery complications on May 2, 2006.

"This is where it all began for me," said Rendon, referring to his father's photograph.

"He's my inspiration for my art because he has always worked very hard and has definitely instilled a very strong work ethic."

Rendon's speech was followed by Curator Bruce Shackelford's lecture on the historical photography of San Antonio.

"I think the main thing that's been said, and what comes back to me over and over with these photographs, is the word 'dignity,'" Shackelford said.

Rendon is a former student of this college who said he gained experience attending photography classes and taking pictures for *The Ranger*.

Rendon considers himself 'prejudice,' in photographic terms, that is.

"I think everything here is the best anywhere there is in the world so there is always a lot to document and photograph," Rendon said.

His favorite places to photograph are ones that he is familiar with.

Rendon said, "A lot of times I find my best subjects are related to me. That's my culture, my world, and these photos in this exhibit are kind of like snapshots of what my world has been like when growing up to where I am now."

Al Rendon's father handcrafted the wood frames of the photographs that are on display through Jan. 26, at the Witte Museum, 3801 Broadway.

Rendon's Gallery, Photography & Fine Art, is located at 733 S. Alamo.

Mi Tierra Café & Bakery, sponsor of this exhibit, is located at 218 Produce Row of Market Square.

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