

THE TEXAS FOLKLIFE

# MOSAIC

ART

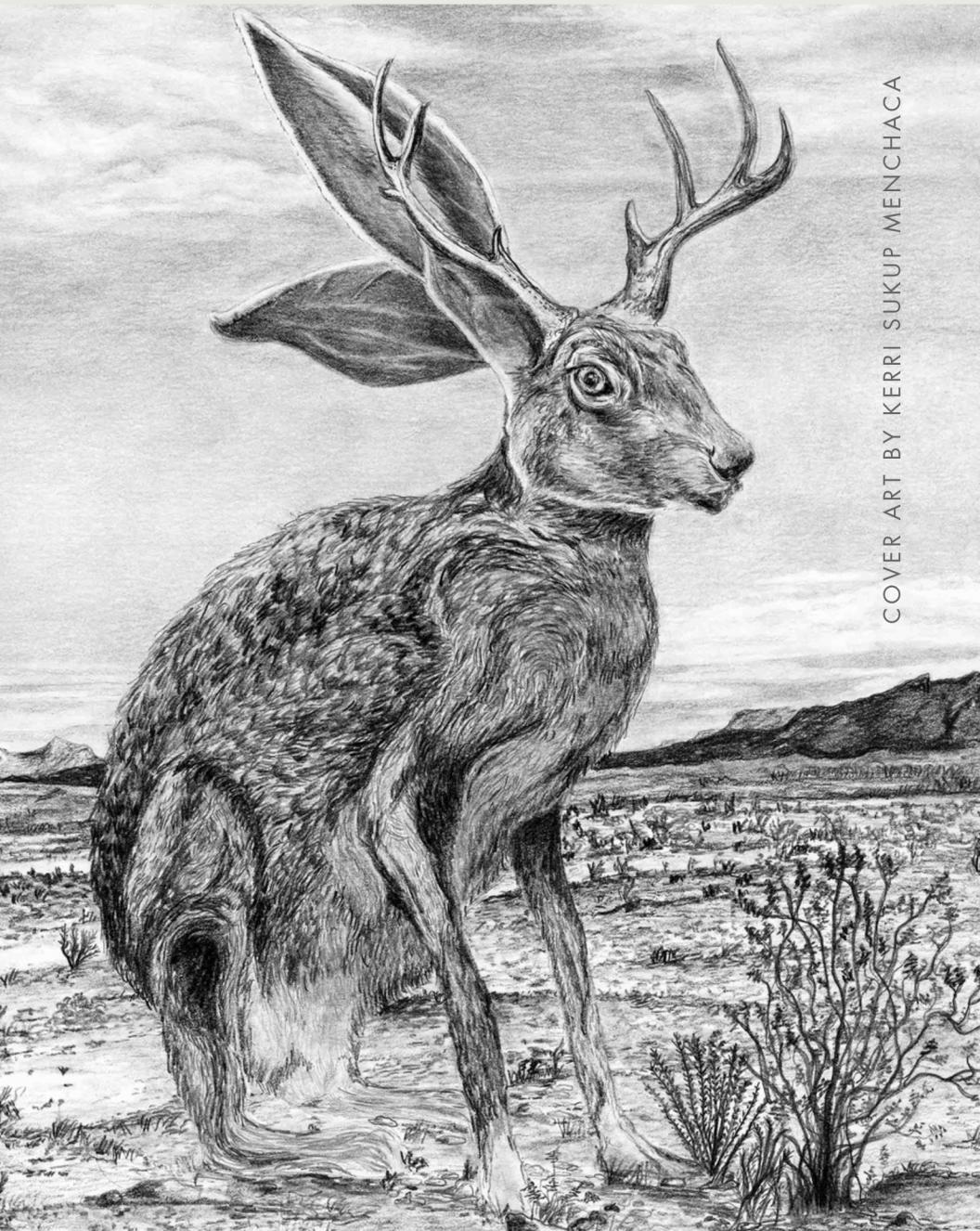
CULTURE

COMMUNITY

NOVEMBER 2024

SPECIAL EDITION

COVER ART BY KERRI SUKUP MENCHACA



# THE TEXAS FOLKLIFE MOSAIC

SPECIAL EDITION 2024

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digital newsletter.





## A Letter From the Editor-in-Chief

Dear Readers,

Welcome to a special edition of Texas Folklife Magazine! As the Executive Director of Texas Folklife, I am thrilled to introduce you to this new platform dedicated to celebrating the rich and diverse cultural heritage of our beloved state.

Texas Folklife has always been a beacon for preserving and promoting the folk arts and traditions that define our communities. With this magazine, we aim to bring these stories to you in new and engaging ways, ensuring that the vibrant tapestry of Texas's folk culture is accessible to all.

Our mission has always been to uplift the voices and traditions of Texans from every walk of life. This magazine is a testament to that commitment. Inside, you'll find stories that reflect the heart and soul of Texas — from the soulful strains of Tejano music to the age-old art of storytelling. Each article, photograph, and feature is a celebration of the people and traditions that make Texas unique.

Thank you for joining us on this exciting journey. We invite you to immerse yourself in the stories, traditions, and voices that fill these pages. Together, let's celebrate the enduring spirit of Texas folklore.

Learn more about Texas Folklife and our programs, projects, and initiatives at [texasfolklife.org](http://texasfolklife.org)



Elisha Oliver, PhD  
Executive Director  
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**Texas Folklife**

# Texas Folklife History

In 1984, three dedicated folklorists embarked on the Texas Folk Art Survey, traveling across the state to uncover authentic Texas folkways. Their journey, spanning from the Panhandle to the Rio Grande and from El Paso to the Piney Woods of East Texas, revealed a vibrant and sometimes extraordinary tapestry of cultural expression.

This exploration led to the landmark exhibition, *Handmade and Heartfelt: Contemporary Folk Art in Texas*, which toured museums across the state in 1985 and 1986.

The success of this survey laid the foundation for two decades of award-winning cultural programs, ultimately leading to the establishment of Texas Folklife. This organization was created to continue the process of discovery and to connect diverse communities through the celebration of shared traditions.

Praised as "one of the state's true cultural treasures" by the Austin American-Statesman, Texas Folklife is recognized nationwide as a model for public folk arts programming.

The organization's commitment to preserving Texas's living heritage and exploring the role of tradition in contemporary society has earned it accolades from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Texas Commission on the Arts.



# Our Programs

## Stories from Deep in the Heart

Provides workshops, training, and resources to help communities document and preserve local folklore. Participants in the **Community Folklife Fellowship** create oral history projects that are featured in **The Folklorist Next Door** podcast.

The program also offers youth workshops, the **Stories Summer Institute** for educators, and the **Stewed & Chopped** foodways podcast series.

## The Apprenticeship Program

Pairs experienced artist mentors with apprentices to preserve traditional art forms. Over 6–8 months, the artist team works closely to deepen the apprentice's skills through hands-on mentorship.

The program supports the continuation of cultural traditions and includes public presentations to engage the community.

## Events

**The Big Squeeze:** An annual showcase celebrating talented youth accordionists. This year's youth ambassador is Alyssa Villarreal from Houston.

**Accordion Kings & Queens:** A yearly concert featuring accordion music, hosted at the Miller Outdoor Theatre in Houston.





## Texas Folk Art Survey 1985

**Interview with Thurman Cleveland | Fiddle Maker**

May 25, 1984

Interview by Betsy Peterson

Silsbee, Texas

Thurman Cleveland, a dedicated fiddle maker from Silsbee, Texas, shared insights into his craft during an interview with Betsy Peterson, now preserved in the Texas Folklife Archives. Cleveland, who took up fiddle making after his retirement, discussed the materials and techniques that set his instruments apart.



Cleveland revealed that he carefully selected specific woods for different parts of his fiddles to achieve the best sound quality. He used willow for the neck, maple for the back, and spruce for the top, each chosen for its tonal properties. His attention to detail extended to the tailpiece, which he carved out of beef bone, specifically the hip bone, adding a unique touch to his hand-carved instruments.

This interview, now housed in Archival Box 4 of the Texas Folklife Archives, provides a valuable glimpse into the traditional craftsmanship of fiddle making in Texas, showcasing Cleveland's commitment to the art and his resourceful approach to creating exceptional instruments.



## Texas Folk Art Survey 1985

**Interview with Luz Olga Pietro | Paper Arts**

June 27, 1985

Interview by Pat Jasper

Alpine, Texas

In 1985, traditional folk artist Luz Olga Pietro shared her dedication to preserving Mexican cultural heritage with folklorist Pat Jasper. Luz Olga mastered various crafts, from piñata making to paper flower crafting, celebrating her roots through intricate creations.

Encouraged by her supportive husband, she regularly traveled to a community center near Marfa, Texas, to teach these traditional skills. For Luz Olga, these sessions were more than lessons—they were a way to pass on cherished traditions.

Reflecting on her upbringing, she fondly recalled crafting piñatas and decorations with her family, experiences that deepened her connection to her art. Through teaching, Luz Olga not only honored her family's legacy but also enriched her community, preserving vibrant traditions for future generations.

# Community Creators

Welcome to Community Creators, a dedicated section of The Texas Folklife Mosaic that celebrates the incredible artists from across our state.

## Featured Artists

**Anisa Onofre**  
San Antonio

**Alexis Martinez**  
Houston

**Kerri Sukup Menchaca**  
Fort Worth

**Suzann Thompson**  
Dublin

**Sarah Joy Thompson**  
Austin



Anisa Onofre  
**SCENE FROM THE SETTLERS**  
(Man with a Horse)  
Acrylic on canvas, 12" x 12"

**Anisa Onofre**  
[instagram.com/nisao](https://instagram.com/nisao)

Anisa Onofre is a sketchbook artist and painter based in San Antonio, Texas. She works as the Marketing and Publications director at Gemini Ink, San Antonio's Writing Arts Center.

*"My work is inspired by the realities and landscapes of Tejano, Mestizo, indigenous life. I paint expressive portraits and landscapes, and abstract and geometric scenes."*

## Alexis Martinez

[instagram.com/artzbylexii](https://instagram.com/artzbylexii)

Alexis Martinez is a 22-year-old college student at the University of Texas at Austin.

She is a double major in Psychology and Mexican American and Latina/o Studies. Aside from her studies, she has always had an immense passion for art.

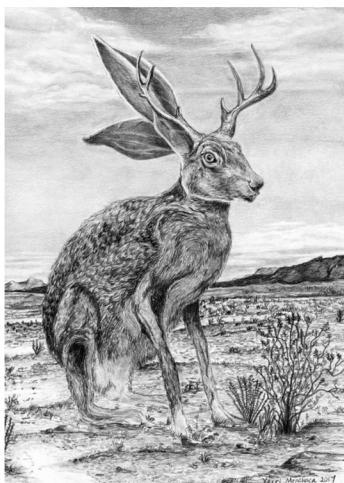
*“With this updated version of the ideal chicana, I hope that women like me may be able to identify themselves with my art and feel seen.”*



Alexis Martinez

**LA CHICANA**

*Digital*



Kerri Sukup Menchaca  
**CHISOS MOUNTAIN**  
**JACKALOPE**  
*Graphite on paper*

## Kerri Sukup Menchaca

[kerrismenchaca.com](http://kerrismenchaca.com)

Kerri Sukup Menchaca, a native Texan, finds her artistic muse in the rugged beauty of rural Texas.

Inspired by the vast expanse of the Lone Star State's backroads and the unobstructed skies that stretch across its horizons, Kerri's paintings capture the fleeting essence of nature's brilliance.

*Kerri Sukup Menchaca  
Represented by  
Western Gallery in Austin and  
Fort Works Art  
[instagram.com/kerriasm](https://instagram.com/kerriasm)*



**Suzann Thompson**  
[textilefusion.com](http://textilefusion.com)

*"Like generations of Texan elementary school students before and after me, I enthusiastically sang and clapped my hands to the song "Deep in the Heart of Texas," by June Hershey and Don Swander.*

*I loved the part about the stars at night being big and bright. I am sure this early training led to my dreams, later in life, of stars playing in the night sky. Constant Comets captures some of their playful energy."*

## CONSTANT COMETS



**Sarah Joy Thompson**  
[sarahjoythompson@yahoo.com](mailto:sarahjoythompson@yahoo.com)

Sarah Joy Thompson is a Filipina-American poet based in Austin.

Her work includes *The Everyday, the Mundane, and the Brave* (Finishing Line Press, 2019) and *Driving into Black Mountains* (FlowerSong Press, 2020).

## Last pills of Capecitabine and the Art of Inwardness

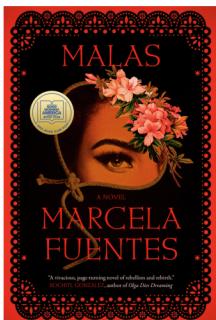
Feeling overwhelmed was part of losing parts of me, first the hair then the left breast, all this loss a role in the awakening of who I am my loving and intelligent self

I'm done with the tough treatments  
goodbye to the days I would dress up  
for my chemotherapy sessions  
scarves, black pointy boots, wheeling  
the IV pole to the restroom, touching up  
lipstick, envisioning, a stronger self  
the way one holds on to a bouquet  
of flowers aging in a vase

stargazer lily and rose centerpieces  
losing petals, droopy leaves turning yellow  
still picking out the old fillers, dry, brown  
rearranging the sparse flowers  
diligently refilling the water

# Texas Folklife Reads

Monthly Reads to Celebrate Culture & Tradition

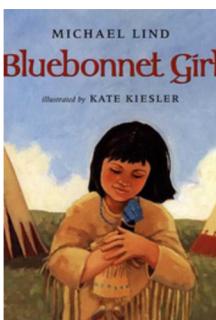


## Malas

**Marcela Fuentes**

[marcelafuentes.com](http://marcelafuentes.com)

In 1951, a mysterious old woman confronts Pilar Aguirre in the small boarder town of La Cienega, Texas. The old woman is sure Pilar stole her husband and, in a heated outburst, lays a curse on Pilar and her family.



## Bluebonnet Girl

**Michael Lind**

[henryholt.com](http://henryholt.com)

This beautiful Comanche legend of how a young girl sacrifices her most precious possession, even as the bravest men refuse, to save her land and people from a terrible drought, is retold here in dramatic verse and striking full-color paintings.



## Never Whistle at Night

**An Indigenous Dark Fiction Anthology**

These wholly original and shiver-inducing tales introduce readers to ghosts, curses, hauntings, monstrous creatures, complex family legacies, desperate deeds, and chilling acts of revenge.



**Join Our Folklife Family – Become a Member**

Become a member to enjoy perks and stay connected to our vibrant traditions.

Scan the QR code to join our community!

# The Folklorist Next Door

Jeannelle Ramirez, PhD

Programs Director

JRamirez@texasfolklife.org



In July, we launched Season 2 of **The Folklorist Next Door**, our podcast series that features projects by 2023–2024 **Community Folklife Fellowship** participants.

The season features a wide range of stories from emerging folklorists from all over the state. In Houston, we had Famo Musa and Maria Luisa Ornelas June. Famo explored the sustainability of community traditions amongst Somali–Bantu refugees living in Texas. Maria Luisa looked at how flamenco teachers from South Texas popularized flamenco in Houston. In East Texas, Blanca Jenkins documented roadside memorials.

On the coast in Corpus Christi, Elizabeth Barger dug into her family's traditions of making pan de campo (cowboy bread), the official state bread of Texas. In South Texas, Rockie Gilford looked at how Black farmers have sustained their land and farming traditions through generations.

In San Antonio, Imgard Khosravi examined the Kenyan immigrant community's foodways and recipe adaptations. Meanwhile, in Central Texas, Laura Villareal documented how local organizations are preserving native plants through seed saving libraries.

Fellows were supported by our fellowship instructors: professors, folklorists, and audio storytellers specializing in the intersections of folklore, media, and oral history.

UT Austin Latino Studies professor Rachel Gonzalez Martin introduced fellows to key folklore concepts and methods. UT Austin professor Maggie Rivas, who leads oral history project UT Voces, covered oral history methods. Radio producer and folklorist Rachel Hopkin introduced fellows to audio storytelling best practices. Lamont Jack Pearley, founder of the African American Folklorist, reviewed various approaches to folklore and media. Mauricio Bayona, founder of Los Herederos, discussed exhibits and public-facing folklore projects.

PS: Don't forget, you can always access Season 1 episodes, created by our 2022–2023 Community Folklife fellows.

Learn about family recipes in South Texas, hand-patted foods in Dallas, how climate change affects farmers in the panhandle, lotería games at pulgas in the RGV, mariachi in El Paso, Ukrainian traditions in North Texas, and much more.

Not sure where to start? Check out our most popular episodes: Sauerkraut in the Texas Hill Country or *El día que se apareció El Diablo* (The Day the Devil Appeared).

## 2024 Community Folklife Fellows

### **Laura Villareal**

Texas Native Plants and Seed Saving

### **Racquel Gilford**

Good Dirt: Texas Black Farmer Oral Histories

### **Imgard Akinyi Khosravi**

“Karibu Mezani” (Welcome to the Table)

### **Elizabeth Barger**

Pan de Campo (Cowboy Bread) in Corpus Christi

### **Maria Luisa Ornelas June**

Flamenco in Houston

### **Famo Musa**

Forgotten Somali–Bantu Traditions

### **Blanca Jenkins**

Roadside Descansos in East Texas

BLOG



PODCAST



# The Shared Memory of Kenyan Food

By **Imgard Khosravi**

Community Folklife Fellow

I have a memory of my grandmother's compound in Kenya, where the grass was covered in dew that sparkled like fragments of mirrors in the sun. The sounds of the animals filled the air: the hens clucked, the sheep bleated, the birds cooed, and the cows mooed.

I can still remember the smell of the damp soil and the rough sand under my feet, where I learned about the land, food, and culture. Through food, I learned about my family's history, gaining a glimpse of our past and the hope of our future.

My grandmother's kitchen was both chaotic and organized. The sheep and chickens slept in one corner, and closer to the door were three stones where my grandmother cooked. The dry firewood was always close by, and I was excited to fetch more. The crackle of dry wood and brittle sticks made a good fire. I understood where my food came from.

My grandfather would often point out how the land was portioned and who owned what, so I learned about our family and what everyone was growing. Growing up in that context and then immigrating to the United States was a big culture shock. As I delved into the Texas Folklife Project, I wanted to understand the intersection of Kenyan food and immigration and how it is tied to our homeland.

The food culture in the United States is different from what I am used to. There is no ancestral connection to the land we live in, and the food culture is different from the one I grew up with.

As I embarked on this journey, I realized that to understand Kenyan food, I had to learn the history of Kenyan food which encompasses different cultures. Through influences from the Arabs, Portuguese, British, and Indians, Kenyan food tells a story of invasion, trade, migration, and colonialism. (Scan the QR to read full blog entry.)



# Homegrown Art & Culture

## Organizations Making Art & Culture Accessible Near You



### **The Mosaic Workshop** 729 Airport Blvd, Austin

The Mosaic Workshop teaches people of all ages and abilities the art of mosaic making through hands-on classes at all levels and community-led mosaic murals of monumental scale.



### **The Magik Theatre** 420 S Alamo St, San Antonio

San Antonio's trailblazing theatre for young audiences, celebrates 30 years in 2024. Over the past three decades, the organization has taken audiences into the jungle, back in time, aboard pirate ships, and on the campaign trail throughout its 280 productions.



### **Texas Conjunto Music Hall of Fame and Museum** 402 W Robertson St, San Benito

In 2001, an idea became a reality with the founding of the Texas Conjunto Music Hall of Fame & Museum in San Benito, Texas—the "Birthplace of Conjunto Music." This institution was born out of Rey Avila's desire to ensure that the vibrant history of conjunto music and its creators would not be forgotten.

The museum, now located at 402 W. Robertson Street, stands as a tribute to the musicians who shaped this genre, offering visitors a deep dive into the cultural origins and evolution of conjunto.

# TEXAS FOLKLORE

## TEXAS FOLKLORE SOCIETY



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