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FEATURED

Sabor Artico

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Walking into Indra Arriaga's eastside home is like being transported to a different world. Sunlight streams through the home's naked windows, highlighting an ornately painted alebrija sitting on the living room coffee table. Three paintings of a pregnant mother and son wearing Lucha libre masks that hang above Arriaga's couch. Near the kitchen, two massive papier-mâché Día de Los Muertos statues playfully stare at each other from across the room.

"Aren't they great?" asks Arriaga. "Macuca Cuca created them and tried to get the museum to keep them on display, but they declined. So, now they live with me."

Everywhere you look, there are artistic celebrations of Arriaga's Mexican heritage, leaving little doubt about her love of Latino culture. However, Arriaga isn't just a purveyor of Latino art; she is also an accomplished artist. In fact, her paintings and photography have been shown internationally in Germany, Oman, Bulgaria, France, and Armenia. Additionally, she has exhibited in Portland, OR, San Francisco, CA, Camarillo, CA, New York, NY, San Antonio, TX, Miami, FL, and various Alaskan cities.

Although she has already reached international success, Arriaga's most recent project, Sabor Artico, is taking things to a hyper-local vantage point.

"I think of at the end of the day, it's about a shared history, a shared experience, and a shared origin. So, [Sabor Artico] came together in that way," explains Arriaga of her mini-documentary film.

Translated as "Arctic Flavor," the film explores the Latino experience in Alaska through the exploration of food.

"I come from a family that has been living with food since, like, forever. After the Mexican Revolution, we didn't have anything other than our ability to cook. So, we've been running restaurants and butcher shops. My brother is actually a bread maker," explains Arriaga. "Food is one of these things that is both universal, but also really personal at the same time. I can't think of anybody who is not proud of their food."

Arriaga received a \$25,000 grant from Latino Public Broadcasting – making Sabor Artico the only Alaskan project to ever be funded by the organization. Additional funding was secured through the Atwood Foundation, the Rasmuson Foundation, and independent donors.

"\$40,000 sounds like a lot of money, but it's not a lot of money when you start working on something of this scale. Ultimately, I ended up breaking even, but that's still awesome. You know, I feel good about it because I was able to pay the editors, the camera crew, the sound guys, and of course, the musicians who created music for the film," says Arriaga.

Over 40 individuals from Mexico, Brazil, Dominican Republic, Honduras, and Puerto Rico were interviewed for the project, but only 12 of Arriaga's subjects made the final cut.

"In some cases, or in a couple of cases, people were afraid to speak on camera. We come from a population that is always being watched, and in a community that is really small, one wrong thing can really hurt you," explains Arriaga. "Maybe wrong isn't the right word, though. What they were saying wasn't wrong; it's just being vulnerable in a place you don't feel safe that can be problematic. So, even though I talked to a lot of people, when it came time for the camera to be turned on, some didn't feel safe enough to tell their story."

For the careful viewer, Sabor Artico subtly says a lot about the current state of Latinos in Alaska. Sadly, discrimination and mistrust continue to exist both within the Latino community and in Alaska as a whole.

"This documentary, to me, feels like it's a good step towards opening up a larger conversation. Latino culture here is really diverse, but because everybody comes from very different traditions, it's hard to connect with each other. So, I feel like the more visible we become, the better relationships will get," says Arriaga.

While Sabor Artico might not solve what is a much larger social issue, Arriaga hopes that by screening the film at the Bear Tooth Theatre with a talkback panel, the film will have a lasting impact.

"I want you to be able to see yourself and to be able to know that you're part of a bigger community. When I came to Alaska, we were at a point where a lot of things needed to happen. But there really wasn't a platform to do it. So, you kind of had to do it yourself. Now I feel that there's a whole generation growing up, where a lot of people that are my age or older, like [artist and UAA professor] Mariano Gonzales, have built a platform for them to see the possibilities of the things that they can accomplish," says Arriaga.

Sabor Artico premieres at Bear Tooth Theatre (1239 W 27th Ave) on Saturday, May 21, 2022 at 1pm.

Other films to be screened include: “La Bruja” – Video of a Son Jarocho en Náhuatl: 6 Minutes and “El Corrido de Mariano Gonzales” – A short profile on Mariano Gonzales, a local artist at UAA: 15 Minutes.

Stay after the films for a Panel Discussion and Q & A.