



*Coffin*

### SURFACE TREATMENT

What: *Chicano Artist: Celerino Cele Castillo*  
Where: Art Studio by Design, 722 N. Main Street, McAllen  
When: Ongoing at the Art Studio.  
Daily hours: Tues-Sat, 10am-6pm.  
Contact: (956) 249-3534 or (956) 623-3720  
[www.artstudiobydesign](http://www.artstudiobydesign)

### **Experience Merged**

Celerino Castillo plunges us headlong into his blended world of Chicanismo and the Vietnam experience with his current show at Art Studio by Design. Moving further away from his 1950s California Chicanismo, Castillo's imagery has become stronger and more personal as he merges his cultural heritage with his personal experience into unique artistic statements.

A "Virgen de Guadalupe" acrylic painting initially greets visitors. Representing a symbol of identity and nationalism to the Chicano people, Castillo has embraced the traditional image, but juiced up the colors. The background comes alive - fine line drawings of roses are barely visible against the alternating broad pink and turquoise radial bars. The golden mandala of rays emanating from the figure is aflame with yellow and crimson intervals. "The Virgin, although a Mexican subject, is done here with Chicano colors," Castillo explained. "The Mexican versions are very subdued; I went crazy with the color on this one."

His Dia de los Muertos painting, "Coffin," excellently merges the artist's influences. Here, the decorated calavera takes on the form of a military medal or insignia. Below, a green haired and tattooed chola holds a pistol and watches warily. A banner across her reads, *For Those That I love, I will Always Sacrifice*. This leads us further into the paintings that speak of Castillo's Vietnam experience as seen through Chicano eyes.

“Azteca Skull” presents a grisly military conclusion. The subdued red background has no warmth.

Bringing earlier American history into his mix, “Cameche Warrior,” depicts a romantic version of the cultural of a US Military Scout. Here, standing atop a peak against rolling clouds, this mixed-clad warrior holds a club lined with obsidian blades; a US rifle rests in his waistband. “They used this Mexican tool, and the rifle, and the knife in the first cavalry,” commented Castillo, “and that’s the unit I was with in Vietnam. Cavalry division.” There are several specific Vietnam soldier paintings in the exhibit that focus on the military experience. “Special Forces” shows a soldier alert with his gun, standing within a vague background that suggests confusion or disorientation. Also on display is a chest containing Castillo’s remarkable array of military honors, insignia, and mementos from that war.

This artist brings a great deal of knowledge and personal experience to his art. After graduating from UT-PA, he extended his education and experience in Mesoamerican art by traveling to Latin America where he studied the art, culture, and worlds of the Inca, Mayan, and Aztecs as a U.S diplomat. It was this experience and his travels that made an impact on his artwork and influenced his love for Xicano Arte. “Today, the world cultura is used loosely,” he states, “I cherish my cultura because I have not only lived it, but studied it in every aspect. Apart from his Xicano Arte, Castillo’s love for painting images of his Vietnam experience is his self-medication, something that he attempts to share with the veterans of all wars by doing artwork for them.

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