



Painted Comal

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: *Comales Pintados* by Nydia Rosalinda Garcia-Schmidt
Where: Her studio at the McAllen Creative Incubator, 601 N. Main Street, McAllen
When: Currently. Daily except Sunday, 9am-5pm
Contact: McAllen Creative Incubator, 956-687-2787 or lrables@visitmcallen.com

Comals with Color

So, exactly what is a comal? The word "comal" comes from the Nahuatl word "comalli." The clay earthenware comal is a simple, small, flat round griddle with slightly upturned edges that is used to cook tortillas, quesadillas, sopes, tlacoyos and other masa foods. It can also be used for toasting seeds, nuts, dried chiles and other spices, as well as charring tomatillos for salsas, fresh chiles, tomatoes, onion and garlic. An all-around great cooking implement! Although the modern ones are made of metal, comals were made with clay for centuries.

These clay comals beckoned to Garcia-Schmidt when she visited a Mercado in southern Mexico. "I would see these in the market," she said. "These are the smallest kind, but you can see there are some bigger ones; they still use these in the villages in southern Mexico. This is an indigenous tradition that's 2,000 years old. I saw them and I thought, Wow, what a neat surface! It was inviting me to do something." And do something, she did. *Comales Pintados* by Nydia Rosalinda Garcia-Schmidt is currently on display at the McAllen Creative Incubator. Although still intended for household use, Garcia-Schmidt has taken these domestic objects beyond their original purpose for cooking and converted them into purely decorative objects for decorative pleasure.

After acquiring a few, Garcia-Schmidt soon started experimenting with patterns on the comals. In keeping with a Mexican heritage, her first comales pintados were embellished with serape designs. "I used the serape pattern and traced it on the comal, just drawing straight lines," she explained, "and I did that for a while until I got tired of drawing lines, and then I thought of the Mandela." That's when her designs really took off. Intrigued by the graceful symmetrical possibilities, she used acrylics to add color (her use of acrylic and resin was informed by a potter who decorated mescal containers). With Garcia-Schmidt's innate feeling for color combinations, the ancient indigenous form is reborn with a modern palette and purpose. Her pieces have a decidedly traditional Mexican exuberance, contrasting warm-cool colors with a range of tonal rhythms. Vibrant and alive, these combinations talk about modern color theory, but she insists that her color choices simply reflect her mood of the day. "It's a craft, it's a display," she adds, defining her work. "Something that you can put on your bookshelf." Overall, her work is about color relationships, whose presence evokes good feelings.

In Many Hispanic and indigenous cultures, the comal is handed down with the idea that a comal passed down from generation to generation will retain a memory of the flavors from its predecessor's cooking life, and that the cooking will be cleaner and heat faster. By creating a new use for them, meant to give pleasure, not in the partaking of food, but in the pleasure of looking, Garcia-Schmidt in a similar way has created objects that may be handed down over the generations as a continuation of happy memories of domestic life.

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