



A native of Kingsville, Texas, Santa Contreras Barraza is a contemporary Chicana/Tejana artist who is a Professor of Art at Texas A&M University at Kingsville. She formerly taught at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Penn State University at University Park, and La Roche College in Pittsburgh. She has also taught in Study Abroad programs at the Benito Juarez School of Visual Arts in Oaxaca, Mexico, University of Graz in Austria, and University of Alcala at Henares. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1975 and her Master of Fine Arts in 1982 from the University of Texas at Austin.

Santa Barraza paints bold representations of Nepantla, a mythic “Land Between,” a Nahuatl speaking term. Her work depicts the historical, emotional, and spiritual land between Mexico and Texas, between the real and the celestial, and between present reality and the mythic world of the ancient Mesoamericans.



She says Nepantla could also represent the “in-between-ness” of Latinos like herself who are embracing their newfound Native American heritage and Indigenous ways.

Over her career, Barraza has explored what it means to be a Chicana, a mestiza. Using a variety of media, she has embarked on an artistic journey full of family portraits, watercolor dream scenes, mixed media artist books, retablos (iconographic paintings on metal), and murals that harken back to a pre-Columbian past.

By tapping into pre-conquest symbols, personal memories, and traditional sacred art forms such as the retablo and the codices, Barraza shows how Mexican artistic traditions have the power to nurture and sustain cultural identities on this side of the border. Her art has increasingly drawn on the colors and forms of Mesoamerica. The Mesoamerican codices have offered her a symbolic way to claim her roots and to invoke much from the ancient ways of her ancestors.