

42 *Sodbuster: San Isidro*

Designed 1981; fabricated 1983–84

Colored fiberglass with acrylic-urethane finish, 71 x 62 x 243 in.

Museum Purchase with Student Government Association funds, 1987.0002



Luis Alfonso Jimenez, *Honky Tonk*, 1981. Lithograph and glitter on paper, 35 x 50 in. Museum Purchase with Student Government Association funds. 1978.0009.

THE GRANDSON OF MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS AND A NATIVE TEXAN who spent much of his life in New Mexico, Luis Alfonso Jimenez celebrated the vitality of the Southwest and its people. In prints and sculptures, he depicted them as figures at once muscular, sensuous, and dynamic. Although rooted in everyday experiences, Jimenez's subjects and their arrangements are informed by art-historical precedents: the compositions of Renaissance devotional art, the American regionalist Thomas Hart Benton's sinewy and rhythmic figures of the 1930s, the monumental scale and moral urgency of Mexican muralists such as Diego Rivera in that same decade, the embrace of everyday objects and materials characteristic of 1960s pop art, and the stylization of traditional Southwestern folk art.

Jimenez created broadly accessible vernacular art. He accomplished this not only through his readily recognizable subjects – honky-tonk bars, cowboys, lowriders – and bold style but also through his choice of materials. He cast a number of his public sculptures in industrial fiberglass and coated them in acrylic-urethane finishes, like those used on hot-rod cars, to achieve shiny surfaces that bore a familiar tactile appeal.

Sodbuster: San Isidro embodies these signature features. Massive in scale, bold in color and form, and with a smooth, highly polished surface, this sculpture depicts a farmer leading a team of oxen. Describing his stylistic approach here, Jimenez said:

[I]t's very much the way the folk art sculptures are done in New Mexico. The sweat beads are very much like the blood beads on the Christ figures here in New Mexico, and in Mexico, the same sort of emphasis on the man's arms, the muscles, the same kind of exaggeration and distortion; obviously a lot of stylization but consistent with what happens with folk art.¹

Jimenez underscored these associations by subtitled the sculpture *San Isidro*, the Catholic patron saint of farmers. Although aesthetically rooted in Southwestern religious folk art, the sculpture also honors the agrarian traditions of the Great Plains, where *sodbuster* was once a slang term for farmer. In fact, Jimenez first created *Sodbuster: San Isidro* in 1981 as a commission for the city of Fargo, North Dakota. Two years later, when the Ulrich Museum approached him about purchasing a work for its outdoor collection, Jimenez suggested that the museum consider his second casting of *Sodbuster*. Once the sculpture was acquired and installed, Wichita State University landscapers planted native Kansas prairie grasses at its base, underscoring an association with this region, its early prairie homesteaders, and the endurance of its farming communities.

Emily Stamey

1. Jimenez quoted in *Man on Fire: Luis Jimenez*, exh. cat. (Albuquerque, N.M.: Albuquerque Museum, 1994), 139.





Art OF OUR TIME

SELECTIONS FROM THE | ULRICH MUSEUM OF ART
WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY

Patricia McDonnell AND *Emily Stamey*

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY

Toby Kamps, Laura Moriarty,

Antonya Nelson, Timothy R. Rodgers,

AND *Robert Silberman*

PHOTO-ESSAY BY *Larry Schwarm*

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Patricia McDonnell is director of the Ulrich Museum of Art. Her scholarly focus is upon European and American modernism, and she is a leading specialist on the painter Marsden Hartley. Her publications include *Marsden Hartley: American Modern* (1997), *On the Edge of Your Seat: Popular Theater and Film in Early Twentieth-Century American Art* (2002), and *Painting Berlin Stories* (2003).

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Larry Schwarm is a professor of art at Emporia State University, Emporia, Kansas, and a nationally regarded photographer whose work has been shown at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C. His 2003 book, *On Fire: Larry Schwarm*, won the Honickman Book Award and Prize.

Emily Stamey, the Ulrich Museum's curator of modern and contemporary art, is the author of *Jolan Gross-Bettelheim: The American Prints* (2001) and *The Prints of Roger Shimomura: A Catalogue Raisonné, 1968–2005* (2006). Her scholarship centers on ethnic identities and social themes in American art.

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