



CHARRERÍA

EXPLORING THE HUMAN-HORSE CONNECTION IN MEXICAN RODEO



DIGITAL EXHIBIT GUIDE

Introducción y bienvenida / Introduction & Welcome

Welcome to **Charrería: Exploring the Human-Horse Relationship in Mexican Rodeo**, an exhibit by the Center of the American West. Throughout this digital guide to the exhibit, you will find 21 photographs that will take you through a story of Charrería, the national equestrian sport of Mexico, as it is competed in by riders and horses headquartered right here in Colorado. A precursor to rodeo (from Spanish *rodear* / “round-up”) that originated in the 16th century hacienda era of Spanish Mexico, Charrería takes place in competitive events called *charreadas* that consist of nine equestrian *suertes* (“luck” / competitions) as executed by *charros* (traditional horsemen) and *charras* (traditional horsewomen, including the *escaramuza* routine).

Charrería also involves a spectrum of events that, while brought together because of the sport, transcend competition and speak to the complexity of collaboration both historically and today. From intense practice sessions to performances celebrating Mexican cultural heritage at the National Western Stock Show; from community celebrations to intimate behind-the-scenes moments, this exhibit peers into just some of the multifaceted stories of Charrería in the 21st century American West.

Of those stories and unique to this exhibit, is our desire to draw attention not just to the human cultural dimension of this sport but to the irreplaceable role horses play in it as well. So when you meet Don Roberto, you will also meet La India; and when you meet Tuba you will meet Carolina Herrera and Darline Gurrola. In meeting them and many others, we hope you are reminded of how historic and critical the human-animal bond is when we talk about the American West - both in its U.S. and Mexican roots.

Before guiding you through the individual photographs, let us introduce you to reason they exist in the first place:

This exhibit is equal parts celebration of the eye and artistry of photographer Chris Sessions. Currently based in Lafayette, Colorado and originally from St. Louis, Missouri, Chris is not only an alum of the University of Colorado Boulder but an accomplished professional photographer, videographer and composer with a passion and talent for skateboarding. As you can read in the various resources below (scan the QR code for access), Chris' connection with the first family of Charrería in Colorado as depicted in this exhibit, the Torres, is the catalyst and reason we are here. Our eyes are drawn to not only Chris' ability to capture shadow and light in B&W, but also to his use of color photography in a way that seems to erase the last 175-plus years. In rich aesthetic alone, Chris's photographs of contemporary Charrería both nourish the roots of this deep Mexican tradition and honor the efforts of the Torres family to keep it alive in the lands of Colorado.

All photographs are printed as C-Type prints on e-panel specially for this exhibit by PhotoCraft.

To explore Chris Sessions Photography and how you can order prints, please visit:

<https://chrissessionsphotography.com/>



Chivo Garcia
Mangana Del Centenario 2018

In a leap of trust, Chivo Garcia pushes his manganas practice to new heights while his horse, Chaparro, stands quiet, ears drawn back attentively. Manganas is a suerte where the charro catches the two front legs of the horse as it runs around the arena. There are usually two styles in the competition, manganas a pie (on foot) and manganas a caballo (on horse). The former is done with the charro standing inside the arena and the latter is done with the charro on top of a horse. Manganas del Centenario, pictured here, is an advanced technique that charros will perform in order to amass more points for their team. But not first without deeply-focused moments of practice for both horse and rider.



Escaramuza Selección USA
2022

In spotlights of sun beams and arena-dust motes, some of the best U.S.-based escaramuzas rehearse in a colorful array of dresses and horses. This team in particular competes in a special invite-only, highly regarded competition in Mexico called Charros De Acero. In order to qualify for such high-level competitions, escaramuza teams in both the U.S. and Mexico must perfect perfection. From impeccable, protocol-driven dress codes, to mastering synchronous symmetry in the span of four minutes or less between eight pairs of horse and side-saddle rider, this suerte is as visually exquisite as it is physically demanding. Sources suggest that the escaramuza team routine of today originated in the Mexican Revolution when women riders rode in a frenzy before their enemies in an attempt to conceal troop movements by all the dust kicked up by the commotion. Watch the routine here: https://www.instagram.com/p/B_Ems4ht_N/



Torneo La Campana
2022

When you fly in or out of Denver International Airport, you might be familiar with the quilt of farming squares inlaid with irrigation circles that dot the landscape below. But if you keen your eye, you might also see the telltale keyhole shape of a lienzo, an arena built specially for charreada competitions. According to exhibit photographer, Chris Sessions:

“Lienzos are often unique and specially designed with colorful elements. Competitors bounce around to different lienzos throughout the season. Competitions vary from small family style events to more streamlined multi-day state championships and tournaments. One of the reasons I was initially drawn to document the sport was a concern over the heritage being lost, however, I’ve seen Charrería grow more and more in popularity, even in mainstream culture, with the next generations growing up and continuing to propel the tradition forward.”



Escaramuza Charra Flor De Aguilera
National Western Stock Show 2019

When impeccability and protocol give way to humility and gratitude, escaramuzas and their horses form a circle of prayer before riding at the 2019 National Western Stock Show. Outside of competitions that send them around the U.S. and, if they are most lucky, to Mexico, Colorado teams like Escaramuza Charra Flor De Aguilera will also perform in the Mexican Rodeo Extravaganza to showcase their talent and culture.

Conceived of and directed by 4th generation charro Jerry Diaz of New Braunfels, Texas, the Mexican Rodeo Extravaganza has been featured at the Denver stock show for the past 39 years. To learn more about the Mexican Rodeo Extravaganza, please visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FMAxUVCg1y0>



Naiomy Torres | Cala De Caballo
Campeonato Millonario Tequila
Hacienda Vieja 2019

Curtailing the thunder and lightning speed of a gallop at an instant's request, Naiomy Torres's horse executes a masterful slide powerful enough to create waves of arena footing. A Colorado-based charra, Naiomy Torres competes in the first suerte of charreada, Calla De Caballo, during an invite-only competition in Mexico called the Campeonato Millonario - a highly respected competition. With border regulations and restrictions too formidable to make the journey for their U.S.-based horses, most U.S. riders rent local horses in Mexico in order to compete. Such replacement horses have often been trained by the best of the best, but it can sometimes take a learning curve for both horse and rider to sync up. Competing in Charrería across a problematic border such as the U.S. and Mexican one brings to mind Gloria Anzaldua's view on the borderland as a "vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an

unnatural boundary” where “the prohibited and the forbidden are its inhabitants” (from the 1987 book *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*). Parts of Colorado were the territory of Mexico until the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which saw the end of the Mexican-American War with Mexico turning over 525,000 square miles to what has become the majority of the western United States.

Watch the broadcast of the 2023 national competition in Mexico by visiting:

<https://www.facebook.com/fmcharrerria/videos/368048025665270>



Roberto Torres Junior | Piales
Campeonato Millonario Tequila
Hacienda Vieja 2019

As the second suerte in charreada, Piales is both exciting to watch and dangerous to execute. The charro ropes the back two legs of a horse as it gallops by and, if successful, secures the rope to his saddle to force a full stop. In the process, smoke rises dramatically from the rope as it gains friction against the saddle horn from the running animal. If not careful, fingers become the sacrifice for such sport and spectacle! Various materials can be used to create the smoking horn of Piales. According to master charro, Jerry Diaz, rope can be made out of plant fibers from maguey, nopale, cotton - and as well as rawhide. The tree of the saddle, out of which protrudes the large and tell-tale horn of a charro saddle, can be made of mesquite and covered in goat hide. This combination of materials and the mastery of the charro creates the perfect conditions for this challenging suerte.



Polo Quirino - Cuatros Charros
Estatad Colorado 2020

In a composition so serendipitously captured as to suggest it might be a painting and not a photograph, five charros (if you count the sombreros) and four horses (if you count the noses) find a moment of respite between suertes. Gathered around the unique wheel feature of this particular lienzo, each one postures in their own way to create a collage where tradition and modernity meet in subtle and intriguing ways. In 1930s Mexico, Charrería was declared the national sport during the Great Depression. National pride and unity was called for through the symbolism of the charro, and it echoed into traditionally Mexican lands of the United States like California and Texas. According to Dr. Laura Barraclough, author of the 2019 book *Charros: How Mexican Cowboys Are Remapping Race and American Identity*, in 1947 the first charro associations in the U.S. were established. Not only did they come together to compete and perform, these associations also served as a vehicle for civic service and to bring dignity and respect in increasingly marginalized historic Mexican communities.



Damien Cruz
Rancho Los Laureles 2018

*Prestos estad a combatir / Be ready to fight
Oid llamad, suena el clarín / Hear the call, the bugle sounds
Las armas pronto prepared / Prepare the weapons quickly
Y la victoria disputad / And strive for victory*

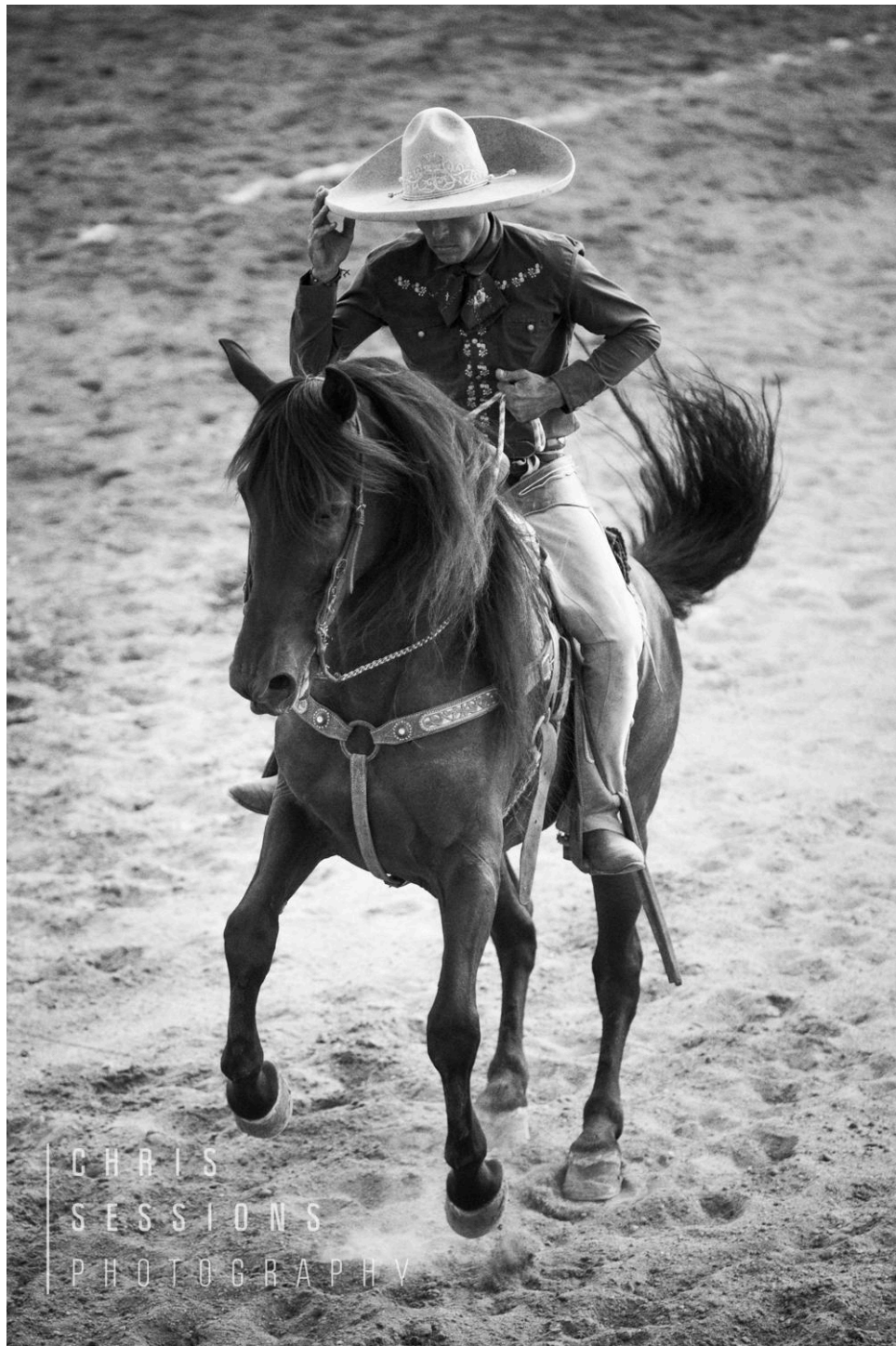
~From the chorus of "Marcha de Zacatecas" / "March of Zacatecas"

Every charreada opens with a parade of horses and riders to the tune of this song, an 1892 regional anthem for the state of Zacatecas, Mexico. In this 2018 photo, young Damian Cruz was dressed up and ready to ride in a Marcha de Zacatecas parade with his father. His father, uncle and cousins were all present to compete. Charreada is a multi-generational event which has been passed down from person to person with deep roots back to the early days of the sport. With such a foundation, the knowledge to

breed and train horses also runs deep and creates horses tame and kind enough for kids like Damian to ride - even without stirrups. From stick ponies to real horses, children of Charrería are mentored in age-appropriate stages to develop their charro or charra acumen. By age ten, they graduate into full gallop competitions.

To listen to the song “Marcha de Zacatecas” / “March of Zacatecas” please visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWdB26F5wLQ>



Jaime Garcia
2017

Holding his hand up to his sombrero in salute out of respect (and according to the rules of the sport), Jaime Garcia strikes a pose as quintessential to charreada today as it was

in history. Perhaps one of the most well-known figures of the charro is legendary Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata (1879-1919). His father raised him in the Charrería tradition of Morelos where he competed and trained horses professionally. Zapata's Charrería background then went on to be essential in the mobilization of fighters, the original Zapatistas, against a string of jockeying presidencies during the Mexican Revolution. Zapata also cut the figure of the revolutionary-era charro in an iconic and mythic way, his style and allure matching the legitimacy of his skills. In historian Enrique Krauze's 1997 book *Mexico: Biography of Power*, he quotes Zapata's long-time secretary as describing "General Zapata's dress until his death was a charro outfit: tight-fitting black cashmere pants with silver buttons, a broad charro hat, a fine linen shirt or jacket, a scarf around his neck, boots of a single piece, Amozoqueña-style spurs, and a pistol at his belt."



Alma Hernandez | Escaramuza Charra Tonantzin
Estatat Colorado 2018

Carrying an estandarte (banner) of La Virgin de Guadalupe / Virgin of Guadalupe, escaramuza Alma Hernandez represents her team during the Marcha de Zacatecas parade. While athletes from other religions are not barred from competition, charreada is a “Catholic sport” according to Carolina Herrera, 2021-24 La Reina Del Estado De Colorado / the Escaramuza Queen of the state of Colorado. Competitions begin with a parade and a prayer as a way to bless all participants - human and animal - because of the risk involved in testing one’s luck at a full gallop or buck. Religious observance is also a symbol of team strength, and to call upon La Virgin de Guadalupe is to call upon the holy mother of Mexico herself to watch over and protect the day’s event. Each lienzo usually has a shrine dedicated to the Virgin Mary as well. Watch the Fena De Escaramuzas here:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CMLqJLEIXJO/>



Aruby Chavez
2021

A familiar spotlight of sun beams and arena-dust motes casts Aruby Chavez, Colorado's first Escaramuza queen crowned in 2018, and her horse in an evocative silhouette.

Aruby's sombrero is halo-like, and an educated equine ear bends back to listen for the next cue from this accomplished rider. Having won many competitions, Aruby has ridden with teams in Mexico, started her own teams in Colorado, and most recently with Naoimy Torres' Flor De Aguilera team. Changing teams is customary, with riders even coming from Mexico to compete on teams in the U.S. and vice versa. Such skill and cultural exchange extends to employing trainers from Mexico who will work with both horses and riders, be it in the U.S. or the Mexican homeland. To see Aruby in full color, please visit: <https://www.instagram.com/p/B9UQqByI7uF/>



Carolina Herrera
La Reina Del Estado De Colorado
2021

Pictured here riding Tuba, a Friesian stallion owned by the Pua (president) of the Federation of Charrería for the state of Colorado Roberto Torres, Carolina Herrera is the current Escaramuza queen for Colorado (La Reina Del Estado De Colorado). A graduate in Equine Studies and Spanish from Colorado State University, she was crowned in 2021 and rides for Escaramuza Charra Flor De Aguilena. Each of the queens have responsibilities to support and educate people about the sport. This has led Carolina to consult for this exhibit in a variety of ways, from demonstrating the dress and riding attire for escaramuzas to speaking with CU Boulder students about what it takes to keep charrerira alive and ongoing in the contemporary American West.



Darline Gurrola
Quinceañera 2021

A celebration of a girl's fifteenth birthday, the Quinceañera is an important part of Mexican culture, including those in the charro community. During her Quinceañera festivities, Darline Gurrola (pictured here) wore three different dresses and came out at one point on Tuba, Don Roberto's Friesian dancing horse. Fashion is a big part of Charrería culture and people don formal dress for such family-oriented events - whether

they be at premier venues or backyard parties where horses can easily make a dramatic entrance.



Roberto Torres Senior, Naiomy y Roberto Torres Junior
2022

This exhibit featuring Chris Sessions' work would not be possible without the Torres family. Leaders in the Federation of Charrería for the state of Colorado and owners of the Las Delicias restaurant legacy, this family portrait features Don Roberto and his two children, Roberto Jr. and Naoimy, astride their beloved horses: La India, Robert, and Mantequilla. Of his connection with the family, Chris explains:

"I first met Roberto Torres at a Mexican Rodeo event in 2012. After photographing the demonstrations at the county fair that year, I was hooked and went back year after year, creating a collection of work which I was able to share with Naiomy in 2017. Shortly after that I was invited to document my first real charreada event. It's a tight knit community where everyone is free to celebrate their Hispanic heritage. Although I stood out as an outsider, I was soon welcomed in as family. Rancho Las Delicias (Don Roberto's team) was the number one US Charrería team in 2023, giving them the opportunity to compete in the finals in Mexico."



Don Roberto Torres y La India
Rancho Las Delicias 2022

Roberto Torres salutes the audience at a charreada while his horse La India stunts a lively seated position. According to Chris Sessions, “La India is the first horse that Don Roberto has trained on his own and is always a crowd favorite during competitions and performances. Mr. Torres is an important part of the community, serving as El Pua, president of the association of charros for Colorado, doing significant work for the community and a winning Cala De Caballo rider in Charrería.” La India is a mix of Andalusian and Fresian breeds, which are favored for their beauty and elegant performance skills. Other horses are favored more for competition. First bred in 1972, Azteca horses were created especially for Charrería and became the national horse of Mexico ten years later. Quarter Horses have also become a mainstay breed for charros, favored “for [their] intricate and quick maneuvers,” according to Carolina Herrera. Parading at the start and finish of every charreada, one can really take in and appreciate the diverse mosaic of equine athletes so central to the sport.

Learn more about Don Roberto Torres’ story, please visit:

<https://chrissessionsphotography.com/impetuoso>



Adalberto y Jovany Lobatos
2022

Sparks fly as father and son do a quick adjustment to their horse's shoe during a private Caladero (sliding / reining competition). Since the horse is sliding, the horseshoes and surface of the lienzo need to be tuned precisely to ensure the riskiest yet safest and most fortunate outcome. Jovany won the US Charro Completo juvenile at the National championships in 2023. In this special competition, a charro does the suertes of the charreada on his own, rather than with a full team. The Charro Completo is supported by a team of workers in the arena and the entire family behind the scenes in one capacity or another.



Untitled
Bennet, Colorado 2021

If sparks fly to make a horseshoe fit just right, in this image a horse stares down the flames of an embellished version of their technological successor at a local charreada. Untold generations of horses - and their equine relatives like mules and donkeys - powered the spread of human civilization across the globe through the gift of their physical strength and mental acuity. In what became Mexico and the United States, equines both fostered colonization and fought against its tide. Today, when not competing or performing in Charrería, they might stand technologically sidelined but still culturally relevant and revered.



Jorge Lugo
2018

According to escarmuza queen, Carolina Herrera, “horses are attuned to riders to withstand noise and stimulus.” The whirl of a lasso orbiting through their peripheral vision could spook any other horse, but Jorge Lugo’s horse stands calm, relaxed, trusting and trustworthy. As a full moon keeps watch, Lugo practices for Terna, a team roping event where three charros work together to rope a bull in the lienzo.



Escaramuza Charra Rancho Alegre
Estatel Colorado 2021

Under the expanse of Colorado sky, one half of an escaramuza team finds a quiet moment on the periphery of the competition grounds. Their identical side-saddle draped skirts recall the same hue as the distant sky, while the individuality of their horses stands out in differing degrees of coat colors and body language. Each Escaramuza team has their own unique dress for the competition, a new one each year, often made by designers in Mexico. The women (as well as the men) are checked by the judges to make sure their clothing and horses are according to regulation to keep everyone - including the animals - safe. Such standards and traditions are regulated through the requirement that everything is handmade in Mexico. With what Gloria Anzaldua called the “dividing line” of the border, and with cultural nexus situated in Mexico, competitors from the United States face obstacles to how traditional and competitive they can actually be. From substituting horses in events based in Mexico, to taking extra time and planning for their gear to arrive from Mexico, such are the extra steps wrought by borderlands that keep Charrería from evolving faster in the U.S.



El Tilingo Lingo
Mexican Rodeo Extravaganza 2020

Performing yearly at the Mexican Rodeo Extravaganza at the National Western Stock Show, Folklorico dancers from Lisa T's Dance Academy spiral across the arena to the effect of doves' wings in El Tilingo Lino, a Mexican folk dance from the state of Veracruz. While Charrería is an equestrian-focused tradition, it is part of a larger practice and celebration of traditional Mexican cultural heritage that includes dancing, singing, musical performance, food, artisans and more - often to showcase the regional distinctiveness of Mexico's 31 states and the federal district of Mexico City. To watch an example of Folklorico dancing, please visit:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CO0uGLKFYD/>



Sofia Ramos y Jonathan Cruz
2019

Taken during the coronation celebration of escaramuza queen Aruby Chavez, this image of a charro and escaramuza, who compete locally in Colorado as well as in Mexico, reminds us of the human-human bond so integral in Charrería as well. Dancing is unique and popular with couples, be they male and female partners or women dancing together. Music, in the form of Banda or Mariachi, is often played very loudly and proudly either by live band or DJ and stems from a deep intertwining of music and dance in Charrería. Most richly depicted in the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema (1933-1964), the culture of Charrería was cinematically celebrated for its focus on rural life through the soundtrack of Musica Ranchera and, according to Colorado College Professor of Southwest Studies, Santiago Guerra, was part of a post-Revolutionary surge in national identity project building through the arts.

This image is dedicated to Roni Ires, a longstanding and former senior staff member of the Center of the American West who retired in January 2024. A dancer and musician

herself, Roni worked at the Center for 27 years, ushering countless students through our academic programs and overseeing core administrative and financial operations with kindness, humor, and a keen eye that only Virgos have.

Conclusión / Conclusion:

Thank you so much for visiting the digital exhibit for
Charrería: Exploring the Human-Horse Relationship in Mexican Rodeo

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<https://cu.tfaforms.net/34>

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