

How to Create Remembrance and Celebration Community Altars

The prompt was simple:

As a participant in the exhibition, you are invited to use your shadow box to create an altar in whatever way feels most meaningful to you. You can draw from a specific tradition or create something completely expressive. You can make or arrange objects or pictures, paint, glued, write letters or poems, build, draw etc. You can work 2 or 3 dimensionally. There is no right or wrong. Do what feels right and creates your own remembrance and celebration of the person, community or event you are honoring.

As in the making of the altars themselves, there is no right or wrong way to do this. One could do the same thing with shoeboxes or other existing containers. We built box sizes that would efficiently use store-bought lumber, but the size doesn't matter. Big or small, for a day or for a month, inside or outside, 2 dimensional or 3 dimensional, on the wall or on the ground, giving people a space to publically share their love and celebrate the life of someone or something they have lost, can create a very powerful collective energy.

Here is what we did:

- **INVITE EVERYONE:** Told everyone we knew about it through e-mail, Facebook, posters and through personal conversations.
- **MAKE RESERVATIONS:** We asked people to start reserving boxes by e-mail beginning in June, but most people did not sign up until mid-August when the boxes were made and ready to go.
- **SHADOW BOXES:** Built 100 shadow boxes (we had to build another 75 because of demand)
24" h x 16" w x 6" d and larger boxes at 36" h x 24" w x 6" d
 - From one 4' x 8' piece of plywood you can cut
 - 12 box backs at 24" x 16"
 - or 4 box backs 36" x 24" and 3 box backs at 24" x 16"
 - From one 6" x 10' board you can frame
 - 1 1/2 small box (24"h x 16"w x 6"d)
 - OR 1 large box (36"h x 24" w x 6" d)
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** We attached the altar box information sheet with:
The prompt :
 - *As a participant in the exhibition, you are invited to use your shadow box to create an altar in whatever way feels most meaningful to you. You can draw from a specific tradition or create something completely expressive. You can make or arrange objects or pictures, paint, glued, write letters or poems, build, draw etc. You can work 2 or 3 dimensionally. There is no right or wrong. Do what feels right and creates your own remembrance and celebration of the person, community or event you are honoring.*

General instructions:

- the box will be displayed vertically
 - the shadow boxes will be stacked do do not build anything on the outside of the box.
 - The back will not be seen
 - Be sure the box is well balanced and objects are secure
 - No lit candles allowed
 - On the sheet, we included drop-off, pick-up and exhibition dates and a large arrow on the back indicating Up ↑
- **BOX PICK-UP:** As people picked the up the boxes to take home, we added their name, phone number and e-mail to a database. Some picked up as early as 1 ½ months before the drop-off date. Others picked them up the week before. It helps to have a pick up place that is has regular open hours .
 - **BOX DROP-OFF:** We had a three day period for participants to drop off finished altars. When the altars were dropped off, we checked them off the list, asked for the name of the people who helped create the shadow box and the person, persons or idea the box was being made to honor.
 - **KEEPING TRACK:** We put the names of the makers and who they were made for (unless someone preferred not to have their name) on a small sheet of paper that was attached to the front of each altar.
 - **DISPLAY:** We stacked the altars, up to 4 high, in the halls and the atrium.
 - **RECEPTION:** We had an accompanying gallery exhibition, showed the film *La Vida y Los Muertos* and had music and dancing for a lively reception.
 - **PARTY:** As a good friend in Mexico said to me “For some reason, the All Powerful One allows our dead loved ones to come back for a day. So we throw them a party.” A good time was had by all.
 - **RETURN OF SHADOW BOXES:** During a designated 2 day period, participants returned to pick up the altars and bring them home.

Thank you for your interest!

Please write and let me know if you do put on this community event and let me know how it went!

If you have photos, post them on the Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/remembranceandcelebration>

Best of luck with project!

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