

Corridos are narrative songs of love, honor, revolution, corruption, betrayal, triumph, struggle, defeat and determination told from the populist point of view. Incorporating oral history and cultural myth the art form employs turns of phrase and sometimes satire to relate the news of the moment and memorialize current events: a kind of musical newspaper. The lyrics are sober, realistic and often tragic, and reflect local perspectives. It is the poetic tradition of the Medieval troubadour set to polka beat accompanied by guitar and accordion. Similar to Western ballads about outlaws, narco-corridos detail the exploits of drug traffickers. Beginning as the voice of the people, the musical form has grown into a multi-million dollar industry as a mainstay on the Latin music charts.

El Rey de los Corridos, Rosalino "Chalino" Sanchez, the exhibition's titular figure, grew up in humble circumstances in Sinaloa, the Mexican state south of Sonora. Tragedy and poverty marked his early life, and, in part, prompted him to cross the border to California where he worked in the fields. There, his musical talents were recognized and his reputation as an authentic voice for the people began to grow. It is a tradition for smugglers to commission corridos about their escapades, and Chalino was a favorite choice; he sang in the language of the street, dressed in jeans, boots and cowboy hat, and always carried a pistol: a native son. An event at a concert in early 1992 propelled Chalino to fame. A man walked onto the stage, pulled a gun, and shot Chalino in the side. The singer immediately returned fire. Over night, every truck in Northern Mexico was blasting his corridos. But by mid-May of the same year, at age 32, Chalino was found dead by the side of a road, two gunshot wounds in the back of his head.

For this exhibition, Camp Bosworth has crafted a visual corrido. Creating oversized icons of the narcotraficante—pistol, tequila, sprus, bling jewelry—has allowed him, like an anthropologist, to observe, document and investigate life in Northern Mexico at the start of the 21st century. He acknowledges the ongoing folklore of Mexican history and popular arts within the culture of La Frontera by creating recurring and enduring images from wood. He employs techniques derived from Mexican artisanal wood carving, bas-relief, metal working and jeweler making traditions. Isolating the trappings of narco-culture demystifies them, allowing them to be seen apart from their cultural milieu, and diffuses their charge as associated symbols of power and machismo. They begin to move into the realm of Pop. Increased in scale, the stereotypical status objects lose some of their connotations of menace and domination and make way for an appreciation of craft, skill and beauty.

Through this body of work, Bosworth deliberates challenging questions unique to the border region: corruption, violence, murder, poverty and lawlessness wrought by the drug cartels. He, further, hopes to encourage dialogue as an important tool for change. "I don't think I'm romanticizing Narco culture or power; I am working through it. It does not mean that I sympathize with these types of character. Art is an inherent form of communication and my work stimulates conversations about border issues, the Narcos, and the war on drugs."