Focus on Art

By Rob Mohr

Isidro Xilotl (El Chivo),
The Artist and the Man

Hidden in the dark interior of the artist Isidro Xilonzóchitl lays the pain, guilt, suffering, and rage that consumed him when in 1995 an out-of-control truck crashed into his car and took the life of his oldest son.

“I went crazy – wanted to strike out! Everything changed.”

Prior to the accident, Isidro had been a part time artist earning his primary living making plastic models and crafting furniture. Afterwards, with the help of family and friends, he found reason to live by dedicating his life to painting full time as a tribute to his son nicknamed “Rojo” (for red socks his grandmother had knitted for him as a baby). Rojo became the symbolic color for both his rage and passion.

One friend, Zacora, whose husband had died earlier in an accident, showed deep compassion for his suffering and anger and advised him, “If you want to kill someone, kill them on the canvas.” For the next fifteen years, each painting became a cry for Rojo. Isidro’s rage and guilt were spilled out across each new canvas creating emotional works of unique artistic clarity with the power to reveal and re-form human life.

Isidro’s December 2010 exhibition “Rojo,” at the Centro Culutral in Ajijic, marked the completion of the artistic journey dedicated to his son. During the opening, Rosana Sapins, his childhood painting teacher, read her poem called “Rojo.”

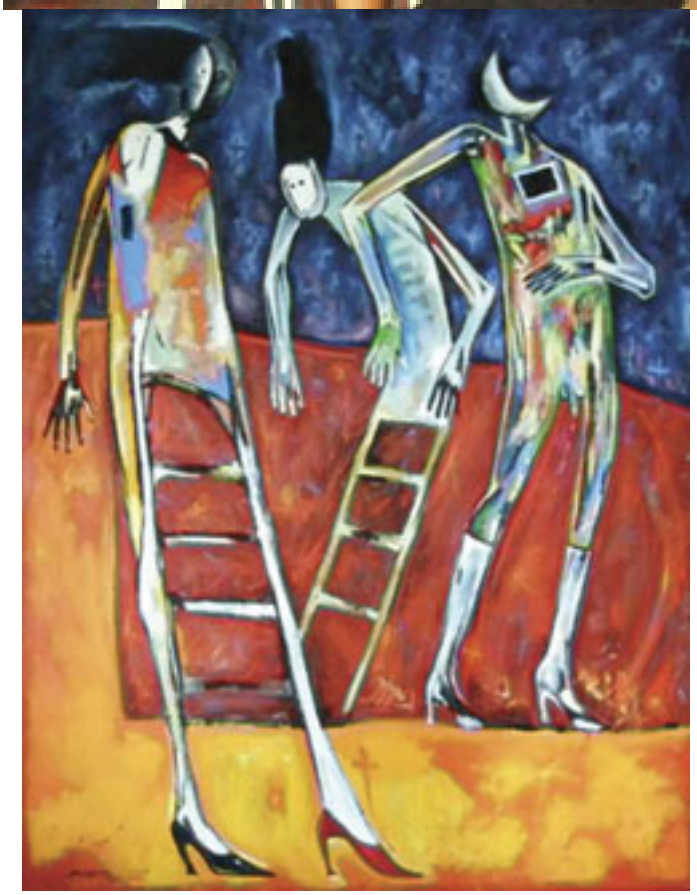
(Within Isidro’s paintings) *“The walls, the moons, the contours, the silhouettes, the nipples, the navels, even the shoes have become the “Red” of rage, of protest, but also of love and vital pain which make up the mask humans wear. Isidro pulls the mask away, reveals the skin underneath, our real face, the intent that moves us - the internal pleasure.”*

This remarkable woman had advised him years earlier, “If you want to paint, you must fill yourself with understandings of life, humanity, and the natural world.” Isidro has remained committed to this task, and to the consuming work of giving new life to his lost son through his paintings.

A keen critic of contemporary painting and the history of art, (his academic training was at the University of Guadalajara), he has a special love for the explosion of great art in New York City in the 1960s. “I was enriched by exposure to the emotion filled works of painters like Jackson Pollock (1912-1956). Pollock’s works imparted artistic license to incorporate my unquenched passion in my paintings.”

With the independence of a Frida Kahlo, and a visual poetry equal to Francisco Toledo (1940) and Rufino Tamayo (1889-1991), Isidro paintings defy any classification. His Mexican gestalt brings into being a new reality given form and life by his passion and touches of surrealism, magic realism, and symbolism, laid over broad fields of color evocative of the works of Mark Rothko (1903-1970).

In his well-composed symbolic painting, ‘Alcohólicos anémicos’ (*photo) the blue and red color field becomes the ground and sky where three surreal figures (two women and a man of confused sexuality) perform an intoxicated dance given emotional life by the flowing hair of the women and the gestures and posturing of the three figures. A spiritual presence moves across the canvas.

Artists of Isidro’s statue are a gift to humanity and enrich our understanding of who we are. Don’t miss his upcoming exhibition, Feb.15-28, 12 to 5PM daily. The opening on Tuesday, February 15 from 3 to 6PM (food and drinks) features paintings by Isidro and Francisco Gonzales in the lobby of El Dorado, libramento Chapala-Ajijic, #98.

(*Isidro’s paintings are for sale in the Centro de Arte y Cultura, Constitucion 16, Ajijic, and the Restaurant Viva Mexico, San Juan Cosalá.)*