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Luis Jimenez; Sculptor Tested Artistic Limits

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Luis Jimenez, 65, a successful but often controversial New Mexican sculptor whose work has been displayed at the Smithsonian and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, died June 13 in what authorities are calling an industrial accident at his studio in Hondo, N.M.

Part of a sculpture was being moved with a hoist when it came loose and struck the artist, pinning him against a steel support, said the Lincoln County Sheriff's Department. He was taken to the Lincoln County Medical Center, where he was later pronounced dead.

Mr. Jimenez was known for his large and colorful fiberglass sculptures that depicted fiesta dancers, a mourning Aztec warrior, steelworkers and illegal immigrants. His work often started arguments and spurred emotions.

"It is not my job to censor myself," he once said. "An artist's job is to constantly test the boundaries."

Luis Alfonso Jimenez Jr. was born in El Paso and learned to paint and to fashion large works out of metal in his father's sign shop. He graduated with a degree in fine arts from the University of Texas at Austin and lived in New York City for a time.

In 1969, he created "Man on Fire," a sculpture of a man in flames that drew its inspiration from Buddhist monks in South Vietnam who burned themselves and also from the Mexican story of Cuauhtemoc, whose feet were put to fire by Spanish conquerors. The sculpture was displayed at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American Art.

More recently, Mr. Jimenez completed a mud casting of firefighters and three fiberglass flames as part of a memorial for the city of Cleveland, and he was working on a piece that was destined for Denver International Airport.

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