

UNDATED The death of El Paso-born artist Luis Jimenez (hee-MEH'-nehz) has stunned family, friends, art lovers and others who knew him and his work.

He was regarded a pioneer Chicano artist who brought his humor, social commentary and fusion of Mexican and Anglo cultures to the public squares of major cities.

A large piece of one of his massive sculptures fell from a hoist and fatally crushed him as the 65-year-old Jimenez was working Tuesday in his studio in rural Hondo, New Mexico.

Jimenez would wake each morning at dawn to feed his horses and chickens, then labor into the night in a converted farm shed. There, he created richly colored sculptures that adorned urban parks nationwide, sparked controversy and made him famous in the art world.

Giant Jimenez sculptures stand in El Paso; Houston; Los Angeles; Fargo, North Dakota; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Pittsburgh; Las Vegas, Nevada, and other cities.

One of his most famous works, "Vaquero," marks the entrance to the National Collection of American Art at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D-C.

**Falling sculpture kills famed artist** Source: KRQE News 13

**HONDO, N.M.** -- Sculptor Luis Jimenez died Tuesday after a freak accident at his studio in Hondo in Lincoln County.

According to reports, he and two assistants were moving part of a large sculpture fell from its hoist and onto Jimenez's leg cutting the femoral artery. He was rushed to a hospital but apparently died from the loss of blood.

The loss of an artist whose large, sleek sculptures are on display throughout the country shocked the New Mexico art community.

"If there were a Michelangelo living in our time in terms of talent and creativity, Luis was it," former Albuquerque Museum director James Moore said.

One of Jimenez' most famous works, "The Vaquero," is also one of his most controversial. Two areas where the towering figure was supposed to be displayed rejected the piece because the cowboy had a gun.

Jimenez said he never intended his work to be controversial, but "The Vaquero" now sits in Gallery Place in Washington, D.C.

Jimenez was preparing a sculpture of mustangs that was heading to Denver although it's not clear if that is the sculpture Jimenez was moving yesterday.

Jimenez, the son of a Mexican immigrant, was born in El Paso, Texas, in 1940 and grew up there.

6:00AM -- ADIOS, LUIS JIMENEZ

BY BRUCE DANIELS

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New Mexico -- and the world of art -- loses a treasure.

The highly public art of Luis Jimenez Jr. isn't everybody's cup of tea. It isn't pretty. But it does what great art is supposed to do -- hold a mirror up to nature, especially the human nature and culture of the American Southwest.

A tragic "industrial accident" cut short the El Paso-born artist's life at 65 at his studio in Hondo on Tuesday.

And we'll miss what he still had to say.

His "Southwest Pieta," a Fiberglas sculpture of an indigenous man mourning a dead woman who is draped across his lap, was originally commissioned by the City of Albuquerque in 1983 for display at Old Town's Tiguex Park. But neighbors deemed it offensive, politically incorrect and possibly blasphemous -- so it was moved out of the more publicly beaten path to the Martineztown-Longfellow School Park, where no less an art critic than former first lady and Sen. [Hillary Clinton](#) saw it and declared it a cultural treasure, according to this morning's [Albuquerque Journal](#).

A closer look at "La Pieta del Suroeste" reveals Jimenez's deep traditional roots and his ability to fuse multiple images from the past into a startlingly fresh contemporary challenge. Not only does he ironically evoke Michelangelo's famous statue of a grieving Mary and Christ, but he recreates an image bred in the bone of Mexico's tragic past -- "La Leyenda de los Volcanes." That image of the Aztec lovers Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihualt whose tragedy was magically transformed into the famous volcanoes east of Mexico City was captured in a romantic, even kitschy way by the famous Mexican calendar artist [Jesus Helguera](#) and adorned the humble kitchens of generations of Mexicans on both sides of the border. Jimenez adds his own ironic and sophisticated touch to that piece of popular art, and brings the legend of suffering and its transformation into contemporary focus.

He has been called a "[baroque populist](#)," but we'll take him at his word: Luis Jimenez Jr. was a folk artist in the fullest sense of the word.

10:30am UPDATE: An anonymous e-mailer sent us these links under the heading "art lovers across the country mourn" ... one from the [Houston Chronicle](#) and another from the [El Paso Times](#).

11:45am UPDATE: For a [virtual gallery tour](#) of Luis Jimenez's work, here's a selection of images Googled from around the world.