



A Dia de Muertos Tale

Study Guide



# WHAT ARE ALEBRIJES?

Alebrijes are sculptures from Mexico originally made from papier mache. They are brightly colored with intricate paintings. Today, Alebrijes are also made from wood.

# ABOUT PEDRO LINARES

Pedro Linares was a renowned Mexican artist born on June 29, 1906, in Mexico City. He is celebrated for creating the fantastical creatures known as "alebrijes." Coming from a family of artisans, Linares learned the craft of papier-mâché from his father at a young age, initially creating traditional piñatas and masks. His invention of alebrijes, however, marked a turning point in his artistic career and Mexican folk art.



# THE ORIGIN STORY



Pedro Linares' brightly colored Mexican folk art sculptures, which have become traditional elements of several annual celebrations, including Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead), were inspired during a severe illness. While he was unconscious in bed, Linares dreamed of a strange place resembling a forest. There, he saw trees, rocks, and clouds that suddenly transformed into strange, unknown animals. He saw "a donkey with butterfly wings, a rooster with bull horns, and a lion with an eagle head," and all of them were shouting one word:

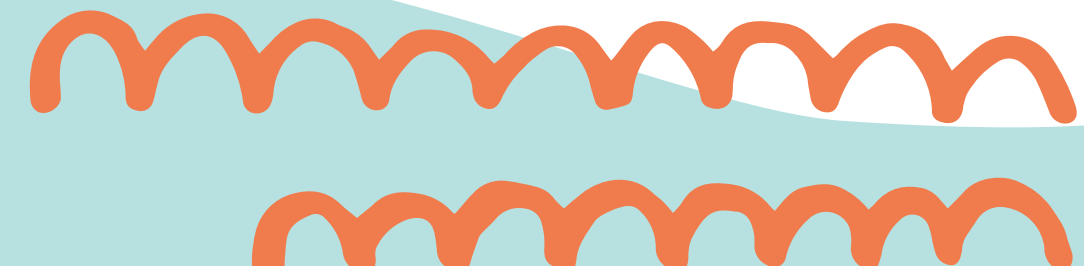
**“ALEBRIJES! ALEBRIJES! ALEBRIJES!”**

Upon recovery, he began recreating these creatures that he had seen in cartonería (the making of three-dimensional sculptures from strips of different types of paper) and engrudo (glue made from wheat flour and water).

# THE LEGACY

Linares' work caught the attention of artists like Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, both of whom purchased alebrijes figures from him. In the 1980s, British filmmaker Judith Bronowski arranged an itinerant Mexican art and craft demonstration workshop in the United States featuring Pedro Linares, Manuel Jiménez, and Maria Sabina, a textile artisan from Oaxaca. Although the Oaxaca Valley area already had a history of carving animals and other types of figures from wood, artisans from Oaxaca learned of the alebrijes sculptures when Bronowski's workshop took place.

Linares demonstrated his designs on family visits. These were adapted to the carving of a local wood called copal; this type of wood is said to be magical, made from united magic. In the 1990s, the artisans of Oaxaca began to use the word "alebrije" to designate their figures carved in wood.



# EVOLUTION

The papier-mâché-to-wood carving adaptation was pioneered by Arrazola native Manuel Jiménez. This version of the craft has since spread to several other towns, most notably San Martín Tilcajete and La Unión Tejalapan, and has become a significant source of income for the area, especially for Tilcajete. The success of the craft, however, has led to the depletion of the native copal trees. Attempts to remedy this with reforestation efforts and management of wild copal trees have had limited success. The three towns most closely associated with alebrije production in Oaxaca have produced several notable artisans, including Manuel Jiménez, Jacobo Angeles, Julia Fuentes, and Miguel Sandiego.

