FEATURE

Central Oregon *Lotería*: Collaboration for the Win

BEHIND THE ARTICLE

WITH JUSTIN FAVELA
BIENVENIDOS A LA
FAMILY FIESTA

Camp Chica girls and instructors staff play Lotería *with High Desert Museum staff in the exhibition* Vistas del Cielo *by artist Justin Favela. Photo by Verónica Vega.*

"El Corazón..."

"La Luna..."

"El Cerrito..."

Teresa smiled and held up each card proudly so the families seated around tables could see the colorful illustration. Family members took turns placing dried *frijoles* on oversized, specialty-designed placards. This was not the traditional *Lotería* game played for generations, typically described as "Mexican bingo" with 16 *tablas* all with different arrangements of images and characters. It was a brand new version created to represent Central Oregon through the eyes of elementary-aged Latina girls.

Verónica Maria Vega

About the Author

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Abuelas *enjoying Central Oregon* Lotería *during Family Fiesta at High Desert Museum. Photo by Eduardo Romero.*

The *Lotería* game was a major element of Family Fiesta, a special event born out of a collaboration between artist Justin Favela, the High Desert Museum, and its partners. The event welcomed hundreds of visitors to the Bend, Oregon, museum to celebrate Latinx culture, but the planning went beyond the day-of activities and schedule. The true work was done through numerous ongoing projects which created investment and ownership on behalf of the Museum's partners. From Museum visits to artist meet-and-greets, and from research to artmaking, dozens of elementary, middle, and high school students shared their individual and cultural identity with *piñatas*, *papel picado*, and a Central Oregon-centered game of *Lotería*.

Vistas del Cielo, an exhibition specifically tied to place at the High Desert Museum, inspired the specific Family Fiesta event. This exhibition presented the High Desert through the lens of family-oriented *vaquero* history and *piñata*-influenced artwork. Justin Favela visited the Museum and designed *Vistas del Cielo* to reflect the beautiful landscape of the High Desert along with floating clouds and images of his grandfather and aunt on horseback, all from carefully cut and combined tissue paper.

Since 2014, Favela and his family have hosted ten Family Fiestas at museums across the country, including the Family Fiesta at High Desert Museum. "A Family Fiesta is a performance that I do with my family at cultural institutions," Favela said. "Having a Family Fiesta on the grounds of a museum is very special to me because it lets my family, and people like my family, know that they belong in the space." Favela's family is involved in each fiesta event, too: "One of my aunts is always in charge of decorations, another is always coordinating our outfits. Everybody has a job and it's become a family tradition."

While Favela's family brings so many elements of the fiesta, High Desert Museum wanted to be certain the Latinx community of Central Oregon was centered and families felt welcome when attending the special event. The Museum turned to its numerous partners to see if there was an opportunity to collaborate to make this Family Fiesta truly distinctive to the High Desert.

A Camp Chica participant calls the Lotería *game at Family Fiesta at the High Desert Museum. Photo by Eduardo Romero.*

Camp Chica participants draw local animals for the Lotería *project on the bank of the Deschutes River in Bend, Oregon. Photo by Verónica Vega.*

Camp Chica, one such partner, is a bilingual adventure camp for school-aged girls that focuses on outdoor enrichment that is culturally sustaining for families who identify as Hispanic/Latino during out-of-school time. The program began in 2022 at Bear Creek Elementary School which hosts a dual immersion Spanish and English program in Bend, Oregon. Camp Chica's curriculum focuses on connecting girls to nature and place, to themselves, and creating a community that celebrates bilingualism. To accomplish these curricular goals, coordinator Verónica Vega and educator Molly Alles take participants out into nature on early release and non-school days to visit new places, try new activities, observe and learn about the natural world, and use art to process and create meaning.

The Education & Engagement Team at the High Desert Museum met with Verónica Vega and Molly Alles of Camp Chica. When explaining the idea behind Family Fiesta, Vega's and Alles's eyes lit up. "We do have this one idea we've been thinking about…" Vega smiled.

Vega then suggested a youth-led project of a Central Oregon-inspired game called *Lotería*. She shared: "I have played *Lotería* with my family for years. When I was a child it was the only game that everyone in my family would play together—from my *abuelita* to the youngest sibling. Growing up, some of the images certainly were a part of building my Mexican American identity. I think of cards like *La Rosa* and *El Corazón*, and I could share so much about all the ways those cards relate to aspects of my story. Other images remain foreign to me—more historical and from the colonial era. With all the place-based teaching we provide in Camp Chica, I have always wanted to create an Oregon-inspired *Lotería* game to play with the students outdoors. It's a game most participants already know and, for those who do not identify themselves as Mexican-Latinx, it's a game that is easily learned."

Intending to be welcoming and inviting to all members of families, Vega knew *Lotería* would be something the whole family could enjoy during Family Fiesta. After months of dreaming about how to execute a project like a Central Oregon-inspired *Lotería*, Favela's work, art performance, and Camp Chica's relationship with the Museum were the first dominoes to set it all in motion.

The project kicked off several weeks later at the Museum. The Camp Chica girls entered *Vistas del Cielo* and instinctively flew around the exhibition with arms outstretched, inspired by the colors and suspended images. The imagery featured brought up memories of their field trips to Smith Rock State Park over the summer and inspired a feeling of connection.

While sitting in the exhibition playing the traditional *Lotería* game with the vibrant tissue paper surrounding the group, Vega, Alles, and the High Desert Museum team introduced the project to the students. They would create their very own version of *Lotería* inspired by their visits to the outdoors while looking at the landscape, plants, and animals unique to their region and special to them. Building on the interdisciplinary features of the Museum, they then visited some of the animals in the Museum's care to gain inspiration. Alles coached the girls on using basic line art techniques and perspective to begin creating the illustrations that would eventually make up their new *Lotería* game.

Over eight weeks, every Wednesday after school, Camp Chica visited natural sites to inspire the girls. They traveled to riverside marshes, High Desert badlands, and alpine lakes with mountain vistas. From these field trip days, the fifty-four card designs were drawn and ready to be interpreted into the game format.

For the game design, the Museum worked with in-house exhibition designer Amelia Woock, and Karina Salgado, a graphic designer in the Portland area. Salgado took the drawings and reimagined them into cards and placards using a desert color palette to suggest a connection to the High Desert. With her expert eye, Salgado created an aesthetically cohesive card set using the drawings of twelve contributors from Camp Chica. To finalize the game, Salgado designed a topographical background for each of the cards, and Woock formed placards for actual gameplay in a colorized and oversized version (as well as a black and white printable version) to be shared broadly with Camp Chica and Museum audiences.

A sunny riverside grassy area inspires card designs, such as "El Rio" *and* "El Pato." *Photo by Verónica Vega.*

Camp Chica participants take a break from drawing and enjoy free time in the Oregon Badlands. Photo by Molly Alles.

Finally, after months of field trips, drawing sessions, redrawing, colorizing, and meeting to ensure the cards' meanings were accurately represented, the new version of *Lotería* debuted at High Desert Museum as part of the larger Family Fiesta event. Accompanied by a live DJ, dance lessons, *piñata* breaking, *papel picado* making, lunches, and cake with many other incredible partners, the Camp Chica girls called out the cards they had created surrounded by friends, family, and community members.

"Los Sapos…"

"El Puercoespín…"

Vega reflects: "My favorite moment at Family Fiesta was seeing Camp Chica participants call the *Lotería* game with a microphone looking out into the crowd, and see the *abuelitas* playing. It was how the game was meant to be enjoyed—in community."

A note on language choice:

In this article, we use Latinx as a gender-inclusive term to broadly describe communities from Latin America or with Latin American descent (although Latine is growing in use, more easily pronounced in Spanish, and similar to other gender-neutral words in Spanish). When we write about how the community identifies itself (in broad, pan-ethnic terms because even here, individual identity varies), we use Hispanic/Latino as many families in the Camp Chica program use these terms to self-identify.

We use both Latinx and Hispanic/Latino in this article to respect and acknowledge the words used by families in our programs, as well as ones that are inclusive to LGBTQIA+ folks. We think of this process as similar to using multiple pronouns for folks who use both gendered and non-gendered pronouns.

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