

THE Current

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Bill Schlotter

UCSB Professor Receives National Humanities Grant to Study New Mexican Priest

Ellen McCracken, a professor of Spanish at the University of California, Santa Barbara, has been awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities fellowship to write a book on the life and works of Fray Angélico Chávez.

Chávez (1910-1996), an important Hispano writer and intellectual whose work predated the Chicano Movement, is well known in his native New Mexico for his contributions to painting, poetry, fiction, history, and architectural renovation.

McCracken said her book will be the first in-depth study of Chávez and "will enable his work to be taught more systematically at both the undergraduate and graduate levels." It also will place Chávez and his work before national and international audiences.

That is important, she said, because Chávez was a 20th Century ethnic intellectual whose identity defied easy categorization or the homogenization of melting-pot America. He was many things: an Hispanic, an American, a priest; a poet, an historian, a journalist; a painter, a renovator of buildings, and a wearer of gaucho ranch clothing.

"Distinct elements such as the gaucho costume; the association with American writers such as Bynner, Thornton Wilder, Paul Horgan, and John Gould Fletcher; work as a Franciscan missionary; and the recovery of the history, architecture, and traditions of Spain in the Southwest emblemize a few of the traces of complex identity formation in Chávez's life and work," McCracken said.

"Decades before the Chicano Movement, in non-melting pot fashion, he became part of the American writers' group as an ethnic subject, proudly displaying himself as a Latino 'Other' in writing, painting, and even attire.

"While he came of age before the post-1960 Chicano Renaissance, his profoundly innovative work represents another sort of cultural renaissance, making him one of the most important U.S. Latino intellectuals of the 20th Century."

About UC Santa Barbara

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