What type of journey does this picture suggest?
Martin Ramirez: His Life in Pictures, Another Interpretation

Martin Ramirez' watercolor employs powerful concentric lines to create the feeling of movement and rhythm — expressive elements for students to analyze and explore. Stylized trees and turrets are frequent subjects in Ramirez's work. They embody the realities of cultures and metaphor for the migrant experience.

Note: The origin of the word “Alumbranza” is unknown. Ramirez biographer Victor Espinosa speculates that “Alumbranza” could be a slight misspelling of “La Lamentosa” — the sorrowful (or wailing) one — a nickname once given to the train that passed near Ramirez’s childhood home. Ramirez refers to its melancholy whistle. (Víctor M. Espinosa, Martin Ramirez: Framing His Life and Art, 2015)

Ask your students:
What type of journey does this picture suggest?

K-2
Students look carefully at the form and content of the artwork. They share thoughts about the drawing, and about their own travel experiences. Ask: What type of journey does this picture suggest? Do you think it is a different kind of journey?

INQUIRY
• Describe the different types of lines you see in Alumbranza.
• Look closely at the train at the top of the artwork. Is it similar to trains you have seen? How is it different?

PROJECT
• Have you traveled outside of your neighborhood to visit family or friends? How did you travel? Have family or friends travelled a long distance to visit you? Have you travelled long distances?
• Create a drawing of the train, or place or your family or friends in a new place and use different types of lines to express the speed and communicate your feelings about the trip or visit.

K-5
Students discuss migration using Ramirez’s drawing and their own personal and family histories. They investigate letters written to the United States and the hardships and challenges migrants may face.

INQUIRY
• Imagine you are riding one of the trains on a journey to a new country, far from home. How does it feel to travel on the trucks, to cross the bridge, to go through the tunnel? What can you see, feel, and imagine?

PROJECT
• Ask a relative to share a family story of moving or migration. When and why did the move take place?
• Create a painting of that moment from your family’s past. Start by choosing a key word to describe your story and paint it across the top of your painting. Use colors to express the feelings of the event.

ART Transmissions connects school communities with the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (ICA LA). ART Transmissions invites the discovery of the ICA LA as a resource for art, education and learning tools. This poster serves as a visual aid to reach a deeper understanding of selected artworks.

Martin Ramirez: His Life in Pictures, Another Interpretation is the first solo presentation of the self-taught artist Martin Ramirez in Southern California.

Born in 1985 in Mexico’s southern region of Jalisco, Martin Ramirez migrated as a young man to the United States to seek work on the railroads while his wife and children remained at home. The Great Depression of 1929 left Ramirez unemployed and homeless. He was identified as a vagrant by police and subsequently arrested in state psychiatric hospitals, with questionable diagnoses of mental illness, until his death in 1963. During his thirty-year confinement, Ramirez began to make art and, over time, produced a body of remarkable drawings resourcefully executed with matchstick, melted crayons, and other makeshift implements. Ramirez developed a distinctive style of concentric lines and undulating patterns, shot through with cultural references and narrative imagery of both Mexico and America.

 Ramirez’s journey is one of injustice and misinterpretation on the one hand and an indomitable will and artistic brilliance on the other. His story provides historical echoes of many social issues we still face today: immigration, mass incarceration, economic volatility, national and cultural borders, and the rights of the mentally ill.

Martin Ramirez: His Life in Pictures, Another Interpretation
Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (ICA LA)

For more information, please contact ICA LA: learning@theicala.org www.theicala.org

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ARTransmissions conecta comunidades escolares con el Instituto de Arte Contemporáneo de Los Ángeles (ICA LA). ART Transmissions nos invita a descubrir el ICA LA como un recurso para la educación y los recursos de aprendizaje. Este póster sirve como una ayuda visual para alcanzar un entendimiento más profundo de las obras seleccionadas.

Martin Ramirez: Su Vida en Imágenes, Otra Interpretación es la primera presentación individual del artista autodidacta Martín Ramírez en el sur de California.

Nacido en 1985 en Jalisco, en el sur de México, Martín Ramírez emigró en su juventud a Estados Unidos para buscar trabajo en el ferrocarril mientras su esposa y tres hijos permanecían en el hogar. La Gran Depresión de 1929 dejó a Ramírez sin empleo y sin hogar. La policía lo identificó como vagabundo y posteriormente fue recluido en hospitales psiquiátricos estatales, con un cuestionable diagnóstico de enfermedad mental, hasta su muerte en 1963.

Durante su confinamiento de treinta años, Ramírez comenzó a crear arte y, con el tiempo, produjo un conjunto de extraordinarios dibujos ejecutados habilidósamente con fósforos, crayones derretidos y otros elementos improvisados. Ramírez desarrolló un estilo característico de líneas concéntricas y patrones ondulantes, inspirados en referencias culturales e imágenes narrativas de México y Estados Unidos.

El recorrido de Ramírez es, por un lado, un recorrido de injusticia y malentendidos y, por el otro, una voluntad indomable y una genialidad artística. Su historia ofrece ecos históricos de muchos problemas sociales que todavía enfrentamos en la actualidad: migración, encarcelación masiva, volatilidad económica, fronteras nacionales y culturales, y los derechos de los enfermos mentales.

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