Art from the Heart

February 1, 2001 By Winnie McCroy

Advocate Gallery, Los Angeles -- Hector Soriano constructed this AIDS *ofrenda* as a spin on the altars traditionally erected for *Dia de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead, November 1) to honor loved ones who have died. “My whole life changed when my friends all started to die of AIDS,” says Soriano, who responded by chucking his life as an insurance salesman and antiques dealer in Texas to study art at UCLA.

For his master’s thesis, Soriano channeled art-school ennui and residual grief into Native American burial plates, Japanese Haniwa figures, Roman Catholic urns -- whatever cultural expression best commemorated the life of a particular friend.

The snakes and insects repeated in his work are meant to symbolize the tangle of disease and health. “I realized that part of life is death,” he says. “It makes me accept more things in life, and be more forgiving.” An exhibit of Soriano’s work will appear at UCLA this spring.

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