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Santa Barbara's Día de los Muertos Parade Canceled Amid Immigration Enforcement Fears

'Threat to Undocumented Families Remains Very Real,' says MCASB Director Dalia Garcia

By **Ryan P. Cruz**

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MCASB canceled its annual Día de los Muertos "Calenda" parade, with the museum's Executive Director Dalia Garcia citing concerns over the potential risk of immigration enforcement. | Credit: Ingrid Bostrom

The Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara has decided to cancel its annual Día de los Muertos “Calenda” parade this year, with the museum’s Executive Director Dalia Garcia citing concerns over the potential risk of immigration enforcement.

Garcia made the announcement late last week, posting a public statement on the MCASB Instagram account to inform the community of the decision to officially pause the parade, which the museum started back in 2023.

Last year, the Día de los Muertos Calenda attracted nearly 10,000 people to downtown Santa Barbara, with live music, colorful costumes, and giant papier-mâché puppets joining in the streets for the celebration.

Garcia first considered canceling this year’s event during the summer, following a wave of immigration raids in the Latino neighborhoods of Santa Barbara county. During MCASB’s 2025 Art Awards July, Garcia mentioned that the tradition might have to be put on hold this year out of an abundance of caution to keep undocumented community members and mixed status families out of danger of being harassed, detained, or arrested.

Last week, Garcia made it official, writing that the decision to pause the annual celebration was made after “deep reflection and ongoing conversations with artists, community members, and immigrant rights advocates.”

“Many have reminded us that although ICE raiders may no longer dominate daily headlines, the threat to undocumented families remains very real,” Garcia said. “Policies that criminalize migration, restrict access to essential services, and sow fear continue to endanger lives.”



She said that holding such a public celebration without acknowledging the community’s fears could be seen as commodifying ancestral indigenous traditions for the sake of aesthetics — a gesture that would be “disconnected from the very communities it claims to honor.”

Garcia said that MCASB firmly believes these types of cultural celebrations should be “rooted in integrity, not commodification.” Removing the original context and putting the community in danger, she says, can strip these events of their soul.

“[The Día de los Muertos] Calenda was never intended as spectacle,” Garcia continued. “It was born from relationship, ancestral reverence, and a commitment to justice. Its power lies not in its scale, but in its intention. And intention requires honesty: not everyone has the privilege to celebrate openly. For many in our community, visibility carries risk.”

She said that MCASB staff are hopeful that the annual parade will return in the future, if conditions allow for a “truly safe, inclusive, and a co-created gathering.”

Despite the cancellation of the downtown parade, there are still several public Día de los Muertos celebrations planned for Saturday, November 1.

The Isla Vista Community Services District will host its annual free Día de los Muertos celebration at 889 Camino Del Sur from noon to 3 p.m. The event will include public ofrendas, ceramic skull painting, food, and live music and dance performances.

Our Lady of Guadalupe Church (227 North Nopal Street) will host its annual Día de los Muertos event from 2 to 6 p.m. The Mujeres Makdeers Market will host its 5th Annual Día de los Muertos Market & Craft Day at El Presidio from 10 a.m to 4 p.m. And at Ortega Park, there will be children’s activities, family altars, and a procession from the park to Santa Barbara Junior High starting at 4 p.m.



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