UC SANTA BARBARA

THE Current

January 27, 2022
Jim Logan

Chronicler of the Struggle

Rubén Martínez, a writer hailed for his compelling and compassionate works about immigrants and the West, will receive UC Santa Barbara's 17th annual Luis Leal Award for Distinction in Chicano/Latino Literature.

Martínez will be honored in a virtual ceremony (passcode 732364) Tuesday, Feb. 1, from 2 to 3:15 p.m..

The Leal Award is named in honor of Luis Leal, a professor emeritus of Chicana and Chicano Studies at UC Santa Barbara, who was internationally recognized as a leading scholar of Chicano and Latino literature.

"To receive an award with Dr. Leal's name on it, and to be in the company of such extraordinary talents, fills me with pride and gratitude," Martínez said. "I taught at UCSB in the Chicano Studies Department in the late 1990s. I met Dr. Leal a few times and he let me borrow his office during the semesters that I taught. Imagine, sitting in the chair of such a distinguished, pioneering scholar! I was surrounded by his papers and books, the aura of his achievements. I claim no such distinctions or pioneering roles. I receive this award with humility, hoping that I've continued along the paths opened up by figures such as Dr. Leal."

Mario T. García, professor of Chicana and Chicano studies and of history at UC Santa Barbara, said Martínez's deep body of work over the decades makes him an ideal recipient of the Leal Award.

“I have known Rubén Martínez for many years, including when he was one of the co-hosts of ‘Life & Times’ that aired on KCET in Los Angeles in the early 1990s,” said Garcia, the organizer of the annual Leal Award. “I was always struck by how astute, articulate and charismatic Ruben was. He has always provided critical observations of U.S. society, culture and politics. He has done this through different venues including the mass media, journalism, books, and as a performance artist and director. Ruben Martinez is a Latino Renaissance man and highly deserving of the Leal Award.”

Today a professor of English and the Fletcher Jones Chair in Literature & Writing at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, Martínez is the author of six well-received books, including “Desert America: Boom and Bust in the New Old West” (Metropolitan Books), “Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail” (Metropolitan/Holt) and “The Other Side: Notes from the New L.A., Mexico City & Beyond” (Vintage). Early in his career he joined the L.A. Weekly as the independent newspaper’s first Latino writer and editor.

A Los Angeles native whose father is the son of Mexican immigrants and whose mother is from El Salvador, Martínez has a keen interest in the plight of Latino immigrants.

“I receive this award in the midst of a global pandemic that has taken a terribly disproportionate toll on the Latinx community,” he said. “The structures of inequity have been laid bare as never before. As much as the work of scholars and artists and professionals in all fields has given our community more visibility, more dignity, more opportunity, the forces of reaction have also set us back, especially as regards the seemingly permanent limbo that our undocumented brothers and sisters live in. *¡La lucha sigue!*”

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.