About the Curator
A native of Nevada, Karen Roop has taught courses in English ranging from Composition I to Early American Literature at UNLV, Austin Community College, and the University of Texas, Austin. As Assistant Director of English Composition, she oversees and teaches ENG 101 and co-teaches ENG 791, a practicum for new graduate teaching assistants in the English department. Her enthusiasm for new ways of diversifying UNLV’s English curriculum has led to years of fruitful collaboration with the Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art, where students have learned to assimilate the visual arts into their critical vocabularies. Roop will integrate Masking, her first curation, into ENG 101 classes during the Fall semester.

About the Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein Gallery
The Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein Gallery is dedicated to exhibitions of culturally significant objects largely drawn from our permanent collection. The current show, Masking, presents a portion of the Museum’s extensive inventory of traditional masks from Mexico and Guatemala. This aspect of our collection was initiated by a generous 1985 gift from Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein and further developed by contributions from Bernice Harner. The UNLV Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art would like to acknowledge the longtime support of all the friends and donors who make our exhibitions possible.

This exhibition combines traditional Mexican masks with contemporary artwork to blur the lines between art and artifice, self and other, being and nonbeing. Far from static artifacts, masks point to shifting meanings and challenge us to question notions of identity.
“Mask”: the monosyllabic word with its consonants broken only by a solitary “a” can summon up a sense of paralysis and finality suggestive of the death that masks have long commemorated. But this scenario ignores the literal and figurative space between mask and face, a place of ambiguity but also possibility. To explore this perpetually shifting terrain, Masking takes its cue from the dances represented by the Mexican masks at the heart of this exhibition. Created between the 1940s to the 1980s, primarily in the state of Guerrero in southwestern Mexico, the masks are not merely artifacts of performances past, but also point to rituals that continue to be enacted today throughout Mexico. Through the dances, communities maintain the traditions of their culture while also opening the door to diverse influences and defiance. In such a milieu, the masks embody multiple identities and meanings.

The masking tradition in Mexico extends back many centuries to the people who inhabited the country before the Spaniards arrived under the leadership of Hernan Cortés. Although some of the masks represent subjects obviously imported into the country, others reflect a vision of the intersection of the natural and supernatural realms that has been passed down from the ancients. In fact, the Native Americans’ use of masks and costumes in their own religion enabled the Spanish missionaries to both appropriate and modify existing masks and introduce others to convert the indigenous people to Roman Catholicism. But even secular masks and dances hold the promise of a type of conversion experience, a “transformation” in which participants transcend the limits of their material existence. Common people are ennobled by the masks they make or wear. Death has no dominion for the animated dancer with a skeleton’s face.

In Masking identity becomes even more multifaceted via the three contemporary works of art included in the exhibition. In their implicit or explicit allusions to masks, Daniel Bodner’s painting and Audrey Barcio’s and Max Pruneda’s sculptures encourage us to approach all of the art work as though it were part of the Surrealist’s game of Exquisite Corpse in which the essence of an image changes with the flip of a page and then mutates once again with the next flip. We are then left with far more questions—the “asking” part of Masking—than answers about the exhibition’s pieces. Is Max Pruneda’s sculpture a bull, a human, or something else entirely? Are the picks sticking from it instruments of torture or beauty, destruction or construction? Can something as tangible as Audrey Barcio’s BEAUTIFUL NOTHING #19 truly be “nothing”? Is the faceless couple in Daniel Bodner’s RB52 emerging from the landscape or disappearing into it? And is the unseen dancer beneath a skull mask dying or being born—or both?

On the surface, these masks seem to tell a simple story about a world before and after the Spanish conquest and might appear a postmortem record of what was lost. But such a linear approach does not do justice to the many layers of meaning embedded in the wood, hides, metal, paste, and sundry other materials used to produce the masks. When read in tandem with the three more recent works of art, the masks represent a past that spills into the present and future and the role of the masks, as well as that of the other art pieces, expands to challenge modern conquistadores and, perhaps most important, our own perceptions of ourselves and the world around us.

Karen Roop
Audrey Barcio, 2014
BEAUTIFUL NOTHING #19
Gift of the artist

Catrin, ca. 1955-59
Tlaxcala, Mexico
Gift of Bernice Harner

Catrin, ca. 1955-59
Tlaxcala, Mexico
Gift of Bernice Harner

Viejo, ca. 1980
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Viejo, ca. 1980
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Diablo, ca. 1950-80
Guerrero, Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Catrin, ca. 1955-59
Tlaxcala, Mexico
Gift of Bernice Harner

Barbon, ca. 1880-1900
Guerrero, Mexico
Gift of Bernice Harner

Barbon, ca. 1900
Guerrero, Mexico
Gift of Bernice Harner

Pescador, ca. 1950-80
Guerrero, Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Monstruo, ca. 1950-80
Guerrero, Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Esqueleto
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Perro, ca. 1980
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Max Pruneda
Untitled, 1992
LVAM Collection
Gift of Anonymous Donor

Toro, ca. 1950-80
Guerrero, Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Unpainted, ca. 1950-80
Morelos, Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Negrito, ca. 1960-80
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Barbon, ca. 1970
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein
Masking

**Negrito**, ca. 1970
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

**Cerdo**, ca. 1980
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

**Monstruo**, ca. 1950-70
Puebla or Oaxaca, Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

**Tejoron**, ca. 1950
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

**Tejoron**, ca. 1950-70
Oaxaca, Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

**Diablo**, ca. 1980
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

**Cerdo**, ca. 1980
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

**Tigre**, ca. 1960
Guerrero, Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

**Tigre**, ca. 1950
Guerrero, Mexico
Gift of Bernice Harner

**Diablo**, ca. 1980
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

**Diablo**, ca. 1980
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

**Deer**, ca. 1920
Guatemala
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

**Tigre**, ca. 1950
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

**Tigre**, ca. 1950-80
Acatlan, Guerrero, Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

**Tigre**, ca. 1920-50
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

**Diablo**, ca. 1980
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

**Diablo**, ca. 1980
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

**Negrito**, ca. 1960
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein
Golden Spaniard, ca. 1880-1940
Guatemala
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Rainbow Catrin, ca. 1980
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Golden Spaniard, ca. 1940-50
Guatemala
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Venado, ca. 1980
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Venado, ca. 1980
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Barbon with Crown, ca. 1950-59
Guerrero, Mexico
Gift of Bernice Harner

Venado, ca. 1980
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Daniel Bodner
RB52, 2001
LVAM Collection
Gift of Anonymous Donor

Monstruo, ca. 1950-80
Guerrero, Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Monstruo, ca. 1950-80
Guerrero, Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Nagual, ca. 1950-80
Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Nagual, ca. 1960
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Female Dia de los Muertos
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Female Dia de los Muertos
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Viejo, ca. 1950-70
Guerrero, Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Monstruo, ca. 1950-80
Guerrero, Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Monstruo, ca. 1950-80
Guerrero, Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Nagual, ca. 1920
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Female, ca. 1970
Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein

Nagual, ca. 1950-80
Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico
Gift of Michael C. and Mannetta Braunstein