

Documenting Cross-Cultural Design through Branding

HOW DO A KEY FOB, a coffee cup, and a gift bag help fill gaps in the Minnesota Historical Society's collections? MNHS curators are always seeking ways of building the collections and expanding the breadth of stories told, and these disparate pieces share a story that highlights entrepreneurship, branding, and cross-cultural design based right here in Minnesota. Together, they showcase the impact of a Latino-owned strategic and creative agency named UNO Branding.

This cross-cultural graphic design company was founded in Minneapolis in 1999 by managing director Carolina Ornelas and creative director Luis Fitch, childhood friends from Tijuana, Mexico. Ornelas and Fitch took the culture-weaving nature of their upbringing on the US-Mexico border and inserted it into their design work, appealing to wide audiences while staying true to their focus on Latino consumers. As UNO's branding has gained iconic recognition, local educational organizations, nonprofits, and government agencies have increasingly sought out their talents.

UNO Branding's work has focused on reaching consumers across cultures. The company's strategic process involves a detailed look at how Latino consumers live their



Small, pillow-like key fob with a design of Our Lady of Guadalupe.
(MNHS COLLECTIONS)

lives in the United States and how to engage them through authentic and approachable branding. From vibrant packaging to fabric designs with traditional Mexican motifs, UNO's work goes beyond simply translating items into Spanish so that their branding can connect with people on a deeper level. Since its start in 1999, UNO Branding has evolved with each decade—while staying true to the vibrant colors and traditional motifs of Latino design that have lasted generations.

Seeking to preserve a wide sampling of items to document UNO Branding, MNHS curators first contacted Fitch in 2010. Most of MNHS's current holdings were acquired that year. The collection includes textiles, publications, and other materials from both UNO Branding and Fitch's broader work.

Since 2010, as demographics have continued to shift, UNO Branding's impact on design across the country, and especially here in Minnesota, has only grown. Perhaps you've been to Target recently and seen a focus on Latino-owned brands, with Luis Fitch's work right alongside other notables. You may have seen UNO Branding at your local brewery or tamale shop, or even at the post office. And, someday, you may see more of UNO's work in our collections as well.

—Hannah Novillo Erickson,
MNHS associate curator



Bolt of fabric in black and pink with ornamental designs of skulls and flowers in black. (MNHS COLLECTIONS)



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