

[View email in browser](#)

## tucson MEET OUR makers

For the past decade, Ignacio Garcia has been breathing new life into Tucson's art scene, all from the top of his scaffolding. Just last month, he debuted his biggest project yet. Keep reading to dive into the world of this self-taught muralist and vaquero—or check out the latest buzz from Tucson in the link below.

[What's New in Tucson](#)



### Meet Ignacio Garcia

When I caught up with Ignacio Garcia, he had just wrapped up walking in the Tucson Rodeo Parade, the longest non-motorized parade in the U.S. Dressed from head to toe

as a vaquero – a Mexican cowboy – with a tall black cowboy hat and a black embroidered shirt, Garcia's outfit perfectly reflected his deep connection to Tucson's rodeo history. It made sense, especially since his latest project, the Tucson Rodeo Centennial mural, is all about celebrating the region's traditions and culture.

The mural has been getting a lot of attention, not just because it's visually stunning, but because it's deeply tied to the community and history of Tucson. For the past 100 years, the Tucson Rodeo has been more than just a sport; it's a lifestyle, deeply rooted in the American cowboy culture. But what a lot of people don't know is that the tradition started with the vaqueros. They played a major role in shaping what we think of as the American cowboy today.

Garcia's mural showcases three vaqueros, each representing the strength, resilience, and hard work of those who lived off the land. Garcia takes a holistic approach, highlighting them as a collective – a diverse group with American Indian, Mexican, and Anglo roots.

"With the vaqueros, I didn't want it to be about one race or one individual," he said. "It's about the strength and determination of the people who built this tradition."

The mural also honors Amy Wilson, a groundbreaking female bronco rider who competed alongside men in the Tucson Rodeo in the early 1900s. During our conversation, Garcia shared Wilson's story of perseverance: "She really wanted to be part of the competition. At first, they wouldn't let her, but she kept winning, and eventually, they had no choice but to accept her."



This theme of blending people and cultures is a constant in Garcia's work. His art reflects the spirit of the Borderlands, influenced by the Sonoran Desert and his multicultural upbringing. Garcia was born in Agua Prieta, Mexico, and grew up with a foot in both Mexico and the United States – his grandmother was a U.S. citizen and lived in Arizona. This cross-border life shaped his bicultural identity, something he embraces fully.

"I see both sides of the fence as one big family," he said.

After moving to Benson, Arizona, as a child, Garcia's connection to the American Southwest grew even stronger. Surrounded by cowboy traditions and local stories, he soaked in the region's rich legacy. Though he later moved to Phoenix and Los Angeles, the pull of the Sonoran Desert and the Borderlands never left him. He always knew he'd return.

"The Sonora region, there's such an enthralling culture behind it," Garcia said. "The beauty of the region, the people of the region, the food – it runs so deep and there's so much to connect to."

Garcia's path to becoming a muralist also wasn't a straight line. Before diving into murals, he worked as a tattoo artist and a radio DJ. His first real inspiration came from the street art scene in Los Angeles, where popular artists were helping shift the perception from taboo to cutting edge.

"I was living in LA when people like Shepard Fairey and Banksy were making street art explode," Garcia said. "It finally had a movement. It was a big deal."

It was during this time that Garcia, an avid sketcher who was occasionally commissioned to draw portraits for celebrities, realized he could take on larger-scale art projects. Though he had no formal training, when a client approached him to paint an Italian fresco-style design on their ceiling, Garcia eagerly accepted – and that's when his love for muralism truly began.

Now, Garcia is all in on his craft, and anything smaller than 5 feet by 5 feet simply doesn't capture his interest. Some of his largest works, like the Empowered Woman mural in downtown Tucson, stretch across multiple stories. This piece is a perfect example of one of Garcia's signature themes: powerful, striking women.

"When I hear the word Sonora, I imagine a woman," Garcia said. "She's delicate, strong, and beautiful – a mother – and also a survivalist."





Garcia, who paints exclusively with brushes, admits that despite being a full-time muralist for over a decade, his portfolio isn't huge – he estimates around 40 public murals and another 60 private commissions. But that's by design. He prefers to take his time with each piece, and many of his works take months to complete. Weather delays and other unforeseen challenges can push back timelines, but Garcia finds that these hurdles are part of what makes the process so rewarding.

"Murals connect with people in a way other art forms don't," he said. "It's public, permanent, and when it's finished, the payoff is huge."

Ten years ago, Garcia returned to his beloved Sonoran Desert, and settled in Tucson, seeing endless potential. Alongside other local muralists like Joe Pagac, Rock "CYFI" Martinez, and Jessica Gonzales, he has worked tirelessly to bring more public art to the city. Collectively, their efforts have paid off – today, there are over [100 murals across Pima County](#), and that number is rapidly growing.

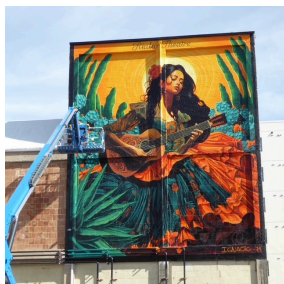
"When you surround yourself with creative people, that energy is contagious," Garcia reflects. "It's inspiring to be part of such an innovative community."

Looking ahead, Garcia is excited about what's in store for 2025. As a father to a teenage son, he's been making more frequent trips across the border, eager to pass on his deep bicultural appreciation. Garcia believes Mexico is undergoing a cultural renaissance, and the energy from his travels has inspired him to take on an exciting new project: a traveling art show. He's currently working on a series of murals that he plans to take on the road.

"My new collection will definitely be a shift from my usual style," he said. "I'm going more contemporary, with abstract, personal pieces that are gallery-worthy."

But once his road trip is over, Garcia says he'll return to his true home – Tucson – and continue to beautify the city.

"In the last seven or eight years, I've been pushing really hard to put Tucson on the map as a notable arts destination and show off the quality of artists here," Garcia says. "I'm proud that, together, we're turning Tucson into an outdoor gallery."



### Like What You Read?

Share our Meet our Makers Newsletter with your friends in the media, who can sign up by clicking the button below.

[Subscribe HERE](#)



Visit  
tucson®

Copyright © 2024 Visit Tucson, All rights reserved.  
115 N Church Ave, Tucson, Arizona 85701

Want to change how you receive these emails?

You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from all communications here](#).