

# 'NI AQUI Y NI ALLA'

## La Neta's Resident Cartoonist Junco Canché Discusses His Origins Growing Up Along The Southern Border

By Roberto "Rob" Camacho

San Diego and its surrounding region have been home to a variety of artists from all sorts of different walks of life and backgrounds over the decades. However, one of the region's most prominent, rising talents is none other than La Neta's very own resident cartoonist Joaquin Junco, Jr., known under the alias Junco Canché. Junco is one of the brightest, most provocative editorial/political cartoonist in the nation.

It's an understatement to say that the twenty-nine year old cartoonist and self-proclaimed "Chicano Punk Rock Artesano" has made quite a name for himself, having honed and fine-tuned his craft for years prior to joining the ranks of La Neta. Inspired by the aesthetic of the punk rock scene and satire cartoons of artists such as, Lalo Alcaraz and Eduardo del Río aka Rius, Junco has developed his own unique art style, offering a sharp, critical examination of both local and national politics from a decidedly overt Chicano point of view.

Throughout the years Junco has worked as a freelance artist contributing cartoons to publications such as San Diego Free Press, La Prensa San Diego, Pocho.com, as well as The Southwestern College Sun and El Sol.

Born in Chula Vista, Junco and his family moved to Tijuana, Mexico while still a child. Despite his family's move south of the border, growing up in the mid-90's Junco still regularly had access to stateside art and pop culture; being heavily influenced by popular animated shows of the day such as X-Men: The Animated Series, Goof Troop, The Animaniacs and The Simpsons. "You couldn't put a writing tool in my hand and not expect anything to be doodled on," Junco said, recalling his attraction to art as a young child.

Quickly picking up on his inclination towards the arts both Junco and his brother were enrolled in art classes by his parents while living in Tijuana. "My parents were always supportive, it's something that I always keep in mind and cherish because so many different artists that I've met didn't have that support from their families." Junco said.

While Junco had a relatively easy time adjusting to life in Tijuana, it was not until his family decided to move back to the states while still in middle school that he realized his identity was changing. "It definitely was true that there was clash of identities when my family moved from Tijuana back to the U.S.," the cartoonist said.

Junco further elaborated on the precarious dichotomy many young Chicanos find themselves caught in-between saying, "As the old saying goes, 'Ni aqui y ni alla' (which means not from here and not from there either). I came to a point in my life where I was like 'well I'm a mixture of my environment being here in the U.S. while retaining my Mexican culture...you can't speak English right, you can't speak Spanish right; well there you go you're a full circle Chicano now."

It was experiences like this and countless others that helped shaped and mold Junco's unique perspective of the world around him; the first real crack at creating political art began while attending Southwest High School.



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Joaquin Junco, Jr. poses below his cartoon mural inside Border X Brewing. Photos by Brent E. Beltrán

“The first door that opened was when I was in 11th grade,” Junco stated. “By then I was already getting a few opportunities of doing political art and editorial cartoons and I also was really paying attention to both politics and life around the U.S./Mexican border.”

After graduating high school Junco continued to pursue his aspirations as a professional cartoonist. He attended Southwestern College in Chula Vista where he immediately found his place at the school’s newspaper, The Southwestern College Sun, where he quickly becoming the paper’s premier cartoonist. Recognizing his talents, his instructor at the college also recommend him to contribute cartoons for La Prensa, a bilingual newspaper catering to events and issues impacting local Latino and Mexican-American communities. Soon after the San Diego Free Press, another local publication that would become his home, took an immediate liking to his sharp, biting style and political satire.

Perhaps one of Junco’s biggest achievements, and one he’s most proud of, is working alongside one of his biggest influences, La Cucaracha creator and San Diego born cartoonist Lalo Alcaraz. “I got into Lalo Alcaraz’s comics back when I had moved from Tijuana back to the U.S. and it wasn’t so much the political content at the time but seeing that there was a Chicano drawing comic strips. He’s very raw and very unafraid to speak his mind.”

Junco saw himself reflected in Alcaraz’s cartoons and seeing the strip run in the daily newspaper contributed immensely to his understanding of

his identity as a Chicano living along the busiest borders in the entire world. Junco had met Alcaraz in the past on several occasions while drawing for San Diego Free Press, but the most significant was when a friend had got him a guest spot on a panel at the San Diego Comic Fest where he happened to sit alongside Alcaraz.

“The gig happened right after I had graduated CSUSB and he asked if I was working because he was beginning work on this project and if it took off he’d need someone to help him draw La Cucaracha.” Ecstatic, Junco gladly accepted.

What initially began as a one to two-month internship transformed into a year plus long endeavor for Junco who still regularly contributes to the daily comic strip. “In the beginning Lalo was the one writing the scripts for the comics and later on he began asking me if I had any ideas and to just shoot them his way.” Junco proudly proclaimed.

“It’s great to work in doing what you love to do. And working for somebody that inspired you to draw political cartoons in the beginning is an honor. My Dad would always say, once you reach a certain spot your duty is to help out people that are coming up as well, and I thank Lalo for that, for helping me put my name out there.”

You can catch Junco Canché as a featured artist at the 5th Annual Chicano-Con 2019, an event that spotlights the work of Chicano/Latino artists while bringing a little of Comic-Con to the Barrio at Border X Brewing on July 20<sup>th</sup>.