

Lotería LOVE

By **Susan Yerkes** | Photography by **Tracey Maurer**

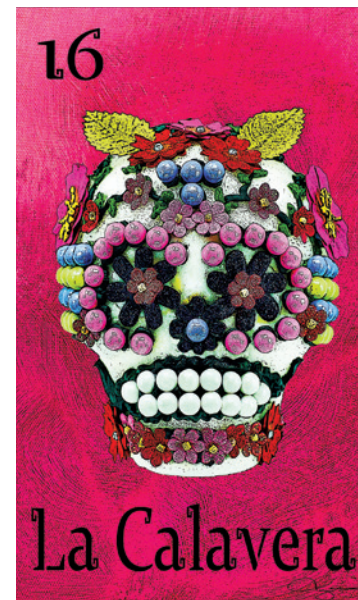
IN RECENT YEARS, THE BRIGHTLY COLORED, STYLIZED SYMBOLS OF THE GAME — THE HAND, THE HEART, THE MERMAID AND DOZENS MORE — HAVE BEEN USED ON EVERYTHING FROM T-SHIRTS AND TATTOOS TO THROW PILLOWS AND DINNER PLATES.

Lotería is hot. There's a Millennial Lotería, with Las Bitcoins and El Manbun; a Covid-inspired Lotería with hand sanitizer and toilet paper; even a Google-Doodle version played online, which includes *El Buscador* (the search engine) and El Emoji. Netflix is producing a family adventure "Lotería" movie, starring Eugenio Derbez. Now, San Antonio food photographer Tracey Maurer has taken Lotería into the kitchen, with a reimagined game featuring mouth-watering new images based on favorite Mexican foods.



"The first thing to go was advertising during the pandemic, so I had to cancel a lot of jobs," Maurer said. "I decided to take some pictures and create art. My husband and my children are Hispanic, so I'm familiar with the culture, and Lotería just stuck in my mind. I decided to create Lotería-styled art with San Antonio's favorite Mexican foods."

Maurer started with creating large canvas works featuring a few iconic images of food in the style of Lotería cards, using complex photo-layering techniques to create



the appearance of Lotería's classic illustrations. But she didn't stop there.

"As I was moving through the project, I decided to go all the way and do the whole game — all 54 images," she said. As she worked, she also began to learn more about Lotería. "I had only seen the version we play in San Antonio, but the more I researched, the more I found out," she said.

Maurer found that the earliest Lotería appeared in the 1500s in Italy as a game of chance called Tambola. There were 90 figures in the game, most drawn from the popular tarot cards. The caller drew wooden balls or pegs with numbers that corresponded to the numbered figures on players' boards. The game had spread throughout Europe by the 1700s, and Spanish aristocrats brought it with them to Mexico where it gradually spread through cities and towns, often at village fairs. Today, there are multiple versions found in Spain, England, Germany and Central and South America.

"They are all games of chance, played like Bingo," Maurer said. "In Bingo, you get a letter and a number. In Lotería, you might have a deck of cards instead of pegs or balls, and you try to match images instead of numbers. In a traditional game, you have 16 images on the *tablas* and you try to get four in a row to win, like Bingo."

Maurer continues, "As I did more research, I discovered the poems. In the original traditional game, I found there were poems or *dichos*, little sayings, with each of the cards, and I decided to include little poems with each of the images in my deck. My sister and I would write them late at night, laughing our heads off trying to find rhymes for words like menudo."

The most familiar and widely played version was created in 1887 by Clemente Jacques, a French businessman with

a successful bottling and canning business, and a printing press for labels in Mexico. Tomato ketchup was his most popular product and he printed up a 54-card deck that included *La Botella* — using a bottle of his ketchup, with the label clearly visible, on the card. It was a clever early form of product placement. He mass-produced the games, even including smaller versions that were put in military ration kits for Mexican soldiers, who took the games home to their families. The popular 54-figure game is still known as Lotería Don Clemente.

Maurer's images range from *El Café* and *El Tomate* to *Patas de Pollo* (chicken feet — a traditional delicacy). *Menudo*, *marranitos* (little pig cookies) and *calaveras* (skull-shaped sugar cookies) are included. Each card is a tasty work of art. Creating the images was an adventure in itself. Maurer scoured farmers markets, panaderias, taquerias, paletterias and local mercados for perfect produce and products. Some she created in her own kitchen, like the chicken feet — a favorite delicacy of her mother-in-law's — that she spiced and baked to perfection.

"This, along with pig's feet, was a new concept for me, and one that I had never considered trying," she confessed.

Lotería de Comida™ combines the fun and colorful culture of the game with irresistible eye candy for foodies. The game comes with a 54-card deck, 10 colorful *tablas* and poems and game directions in Spanish and English. It's available online, where you will also find postcards and canvas prints of the colorful icons, and at Mockingbird Handprints in Blue Star and at the Estancia del Norte Hotel's Regalo Boutique, both in San Antonio. ♦

LOTERÍA DE COMIDA

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