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By Amber Gibson
Photography by Janelle Jones



A Cut Above

Kathleen Trenchard's *papel picado* pieces celebrate San Antonio



Colorful, intricately cut tissue-paper flags, or *banderillas*, adorn San Antonio's streets during holidays and festivals, such as Day of the Dead. While most are machine-produced party decorations, there's at least one woman who still makes *papel picado* ("punched paper") by hand.

Kathleen Trenchard fell in love with the Mexican folk craft after moving to San Antonio in the late 1980s, and the Pratt Institute graduate has devoted her career to it ever since. *Papel picado* traces its origins to the town of San Salvador Huixcolotla in Puebla, where artists began working with silken *papel de*

china during the 17th century. Today, Trenchard mostly uses paper as her medium, but she has also crafted metal bus shelters and a plastic-vinyl installation for the AT&T Center.

"Everything starts with an original drawing," says Trenchard, whose designs include skulls (*calaveras*) and local scenes such as the Alamo, the River Walk, and the Maria's Tortillas stand (pictured) from the "A Night in Old San Antonio" festival. "As I'm drawing, I'm thinking of how I'm going to cut it and how it's going to hold together. It takes some engineering and vision, but once I have that

done, it's just cut, cut, cut." Trenchard uses hammers, chisels, knives, and scissors, working for two hours at a time in a process she describes as relaxing and meditative. She thinks about not just the way the paper will look, but also the shadows it will cast as it hangs.

Aside from creating these works, Trenchard also hosts demonstrations and workshops at her private studio and gallery, in a 19th-century farmhouse on Woodlawn Lake. "I enjoy spreading the word and appreciating the heritage of *papel picado*," she says. "It's so uniquely San Antonio." *Banderillas* from \$10, cut-it-out.org