

FAVORITE

PATI JINICH

Chef, author,
TV host of *Pati's
Mexican Table*
Photo: Jennifer
Chase



Hombres Cosechando (Men Harvesting)
Maximino Javier (b. 1948)
2002, oil on canvas, 32 1/4 x 22 in.
Collection of Pati Jinich

The TV chef and author Pati Jinich knows the recipe for making a home. “When you plant fruit trees on the land, build walls, and put art on those walls, it means you’ve found your home.” Just as Jinich is used to assembling the many ingredients for her dishes, so, too, is she adept at finding the right works for her home that aesthetically nourish her and her family. One of the ingredients that defines the home she shares in Chevy Chase, Maryland, with her husband and three children (who make occasional appearances on her PBS show, *Pati's Mexican Table*) is Maximino Javier’s *Hombres Cosechando* (Men Harvesting), which hangs in the living room.

Jinich, whose culinary expertise is itself an art form, was raised in a Mexico City household where paintings were a mainstay, though they rarely stayed in place. Her mother was an art dealer, so she “grew up with art on the walls.” She says, “I would see art come and go, but every once in a while a piece would arrive that my mother couldn’t live without. Javier’s *Hombres Cosechando* was one

of them. She loved this painting when she bought it directly from the artist in Oaxaca. I always loved it, too, and when she said, many years later, that she might sell it, I bought it from her.”

Jinich continues, “To me, this painting exemplifies the spirit of Mexico. The magic realism you read in novels, that you watch in movies, that you see in art, is how we live and embrace life in Mexico. Magic realism is both what you actually see and what you perceive. Lovers, for instance, might be so in love that they feel they’re flying in the sky. Of course, they’re not flying, though you can picture them doing so in spirit.”

One of the reasons Jinich has such an enormous and devoted TV following is that she conveys a palpable on-screen optimism — not just that the roasted salsa verde and Oaxacan roast chicken will turn out as well in your kitchen as they do in hers, but also

that life is filled with joy, people to meet, and places to visit. “I’ve often been called ‘a walking antidepressant.’ Some people feel that the glass in life is either half full or half empty, whereas I always see it as overflowing.”

It’s that very dynamic that attracts Jinich to the Javier painting, which depicts two workers in a fruit orchard, laboring under a sky she calls “the truest blue.” Within that cloudless expanse, cut with a crescent of moon, is a fat horse, flying so fast that baskets are falling off the wagon. With the animal aloft, Jinich likens the painting to a scene by Marc Chagall, who often depicted people and animals in air. “Here the two workers seem so happy and they appear to be interacting with the galloping horse.”

Jinich points, too, to the stumps of cut branches on the tree and its cement trough, which indicates to her that this is an orchard near a town. On the ground, Javier painted a semblance of daylight, while his sky reveals the approach of night. “It’s common in Mexican art and literature that the daytime meets nighttime and that work time meets play time.”

While Jinich admits to liking paintings that tell stories, she, too, is a story creator and teller. Many of her episodes show her meeting fellow chefs, restaurateurs, purveyors, farmers, fruit pickers, and women in their home kitchens in Mexico, where she has them tell stories, not just about products but also about their lives.

“Javier’s painting definitely relates to my life as a television chef and host because it’s about how I see the world — through bold colors, how life is connecting with people and their stories, meeting wonderful real-life characters who are keeping Mexico’s cuisine and culture alive. I love magic realism because that is the way I approach life.”

