

# A Naive art form

Stark Galleries displays Central and South American cultural paintings

BY MARIUM MOHIUDDIN  
 Staff writer

The weather is hot and the people are lively, happy and beautifully dressed. The music is playing, and the crowds are cheering.

For those standing outside in the Texas heat, imaging the heat of the scene may not be too difficult. However, imagining taking part in a Central or South American wedding or everyday life may not be as easy.

A new exhibition has been brought to Texas A&M which can allow the viewer to enter, taste and feel a whole new world.

Starting Sept. 4 through Oct. 19, "Imagining the World Through Naive Painting," an Ibero-American exhibition will make its premiere at A&M in the J. Wayne Stark University Center Galleries in the MSC. A&M is the first stop for the exhibit's nationwide tour, which will continue through 1999. The tour will include stops in Florida, Nebraska, at Duke University and at William and Mary University.

The exhibition originated in Washington and was brought to A&M because the exhibitors wanted to premiere the tour in a university environment. The collection includes pieces from 17 countries in the Caribbean and Central and South American countries.

Naive artists are self-taught artists. They

can be found all over the world.

Most of their artwork is two-dimensional. This adds to the simplicity and uniqueness of the exhibition. All artists start out as Naive artists, but through life, an artist perfects his or her technique. Naive artists continue to paint in the simple style, rather than a chronological style. They use bright and vivid colors.

Dr. Henry Schmidt, a Latin American history professor, said Naive painting first began in Latin America during the colonial period. As time passed, many new art forms were presented in Latin America, and Naive painting became part of the traditions. However, people still displayed them in houses.

"Naive artwork is a marvelous depiction of street life," Schmidt said. "The elite artists of Latin America saw the popular painting at family homes, and were inspired by the popular tradition and began to paint in the Naive style."

"Naive painting is a cultural identity of modern Latin America. Latin Americans look at tradition with great respect."

Through the years, Naive painting has become very popular. In the international community it has recently gained the recognition of a serious art form.

The work is accessible. One look unlocks the paintings' ideas and meanings, and allows the viewer to step into another world.

The artists paint about everyday life and culture — weddings, street scenes, memories.

Ramon Cano Manilla, a Mexican artist, has nine works displayed at the galleries. They were painted late in his life and depict childhood memories.

Catherine Hastedt, curator of Stark Galleries, said many of the artists did not start painting until late in their lives. However, she said this does not take away from their talent.

"Many of them are premiere artists in their country and have national recognition," she said.

Haiti led the Naive artists into the 20th century.

"One of the more popular artists, Wilson Bigaud, was a child prodigy of Naive painting and is called the Rafael of Haiti," Hastedt said.

Bigaud began painting when he was 14 years old for churches and anybody who gave him a job. In a country that is 90 percent Christian and 10 percent Voodoo, painting churches was not favored.

A Haitian lady told him to stop painting churches or she would curse him. He refused to stop, then began having a series of nervous breakdowns before his disappearance.

His last known work was discovered in the 1970s, and it is believed that he died.



BRANDON BOLLOM/The Bureau

This painting, along with other Naive artwork, is a part of the "Imagining the World Through Naive Painting" exhibit now on display at the J. Wayne Stark University Center Galleries.

Three of his pieces are displayed in the galleries. Looking at the pieces, a difference of the decline of his style and artistry can be detected as the years progressed.

Lisa Davis, a resident of Bryan-College Station, and a renter to A&M students, said the paintings bring one closer to the culture and the people.

Davis said she came to the galleries as an assignment from her floral design class. She said she could spend a lot of time and

thought looking at the paintings.

"It is a cultural celebration," she said. "The ideas are still vivid and alive, and the colors are bright. The art looks childlike and simple."

The J. Wayne Stark Galleries are open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. and from 12 p.m. to 6 p.m. on weekends.

Tours are available for groups of five or more. The exhibition will be in the galleries until mid-October.

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