



ORGANIZACION DE LOS ESTADOS AMERICANOS  
ORGANIZAÇÃO DOS ESTADOS AMERICANOS  
ORGANISATION DES ETATS AMERICAINS  
ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

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17th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20006

AUDIO VISUAL PROGRAM

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Set 254 and 255  
NICARAGUA

The Primitive Artists of Nicaragua

"Rousseau once said to Pablo Picasso that they both were the best painters of their era. Parodying that witty remark, it could well be said that the primitive painting of Nicaragua and the various art tendencies that coexist today constitute the excellence of Nicaraguan painting, which arose from the will and expression of national modernity, beginning in the 1950's"

It was not in vain that Rodriego Peñalba, the Director of Fine Arts, and artist who introduced contemporary painting to Nicaragua, encouraged Doña Asilia Guillén, a very old embroiderer, to take up the artists brushes and become what is known as a "naive" painter. Doña Asilia presented the world as an archipelago populated by multiple details, reflecting in her charming compositions, scenes from Granada, her native city. She painted with minute precision, brushed strokes that glow like silk threads of her embroidery.

The term "primitive" is applied to the self taught artist who neither follows academic tradition nor participates in new developments in art. This term links the artist with the remote tradition of spontaneous, direct, instinctive painting, which has been cultivated from the earliest phases of art history to the present day.

In his "Art Critics Journal" Klaus Jurgen-Fischer outlined certain qualities of the primitive painter, using the terms "primitive" and "naive" interchangeably. "The naive painter surrenders himself wholly to the fundamental human desire for creating order, and he achieves order with his forms and colors to astonishing aesthetic perfection. The economic disposition of planes and spaces is one area in which the naives often far surpass the professionals..."

Primitive painting as a movement arose in Nicaragua on an island of the archipelago of Solentiname (an archipelago of 38 islands), in the Lake of Nicaragua. In 1966, when the priest and poet, Ernesto Cardenal arrived in Solentiname, it had a population of ninety families; farmers, craftspeople and fishermen. They had developed a culture on this immense lake with its many tropical islands, centered on a life close to nature. With the encouragement of Ernesto Cardenal, an artists' center was established. The people began to create scenes with beautiful luminous colors, realistically representing their surroundings with detailed spontaneity of people who have spent their lives observing their environment.

Alejandro Guevara, a member of the community has said, "Painting in Solentiname is considered a job...a painter plants a banana plant or a corn plant in his picture as he sows it in the field. I have always considered that

museum of modern art of latin america



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the details of the picture are very significant...for example, a sail boat that a painter paints is always going somewhere,...when he paints a small farm, he does so with the same care and technique as if he were going to live on it."

Painters of the Indian neighborhoods of Monimbó and Subtiava, of Somoto and Boaco, of the Atlantic Coast, and of León and Masata, have already exhibited in various countries of Latin America and Europe. In 1982, a show was presented in West Berlin. German critics called it the best exhibition seen there in the last ten years, remarking on the quality of work combined with the purity of the artistic intent. Nicaraguan primitive painting can only be compared with Haitian and Yugoslavian primitive painting according to the well-known Yugoslavian art critic Bihalju-Merin.

The Organization of American States held an exhibit of nineteen self-taught artists on November 29 to December 30, 1983. Included were the works by; Eduardo Arana, Luis Alvarado, Rodolfo Arellano, José Faustino Altamirano, Fernando Altamirano, Alejandro Cabrera, Julia Chavarria, Milagros Chavarria, Carlos Garcia, Mercedes Graham, Miriam Guevara, Olivia Guevara, Olga Madariaga, Carlos Marengo, Pablo Mayorga, Rosa Pineda, Rafael, Mariana Samson, Yelba Ubau.

Text by Nicole Ober after the comments in the catalogue to the exhibit, "Primitive Artists of Nicaragua" written by Julio Valle. 1983.

Photographs by Angel Hurtado

Other sources:

Bihalji-Merin, Oto. "Masters of Naive Art: A History and Worldwide Survey". McGraw-Hill Book Company. New York. (Printed in Yugoslavia)

Castedo, Leopoldo. "A History of Latin American Art and Architecture". Frederick A. Praeger, New York 1969.

Gardner, Helen. "Gardner's Art Through the Ages". Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. New York. 1980.

- 255 A. Milagros Chavarria. "La Cosecha de Cacao"  
"Picking Cacao"  
oil on canvas
- 255 B. Yelba Ubau. "La Escuela"  
"The School"  
oil on canvas  
Born in 1958, school teacher.
- 255 C. Carlos Garcia. "Loma de la Isla Chichicaste"  
"Hill on Chichicaste Island"  
oil on canvas  
Born in 1955, farmer, creates a well organized work  
with a characteristic sadness.
- 255 D. Olga Madariaga. "La Habitación" 1983.  
"The Room"  
oil on canvass
- 255 E. Fernando Altamirano. "Portuaria de San Carlos"  
"Port of San Carlos"  
oil on canvas
- 255 F. RAFAEL "La Palmera"  
"The Palm Tree"  
oil on canvas
- 255 G. Fernando Altamirano. "Islote"  
"Little Island"  
oil on canvas
- 255 H. Mercedes Graham. "La Nocha del Cadejo"  
"The Night of the Cadejo"  
acrylic on canvas
- 255 I. Miriam Guevara. "Río al Atardecer"  
"The River at Dusk"  
oil on canvas
- 255 J. José Faustino Altamirano.  
"Educación de Adultos"  
"Adult Education"  
oil on canvas



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SET 254

- 254 A Pablo Mayorga. "Pedimos La Paz"  
"We Ask for Peace"  
oil on canvas  
Born in 1955, farmer, painting since his youth, he  
has developed a definite style.
- 254 B Olivia Guevara "Lago de Nicaragua"  
"Lake Nicaragua"  
oil on canvas
- 254 C Rodolfo Arellano. "Adam and Eve"  
oil on canvas  
Born in 1943, farmer.
- 254 D Julia Chavarria. "La Cosecha de Café"  
"Picking Coffee"  
oil on canvas
- 254 E Mariana Samson "La Hija del Cacique" 1980.  
"The Chief's Daughter"  
oil on canvas
- 254 F Alejandro Cabrera. "Finca con Corral"  
"Farm with Corral"  
oil on canvas
- 254 G Carlos Marengo "Fiesta Popular" 1983.  
"People's Festival"  
oil on canvas  
Born in 1958, in the neighborhood of Monimbó in Masaya.
- 254 H Rosa Pineda "Casitas de Solentiname"  
"Little Houses of Solentiname"  
oil on canvas
- 254 I Eduardo Arana "Río Patapurro"  
"Patapurro River"  
oil on canvas  
A farmer by trade, one of the first people to paint in  
Solentiname
- 254 J Luis Alvarado. "Comunidad 'El Pocote'"  
"'El Pocote' Community"  
oil on canvas