

Mexican heritage on display in prints exhibition



(Clockwise from the top): Lucia-Maya's; Del Compo's; Javier's; and Tamay's.



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By **Mariam Hamdy** **March 10, 2009, 2:00 am**

A collection of 66 images by 17 Hispanic-American artists taken between 1972 and 2004 have reached Cairo, its first stop in the Middle East.

The exhibition, titled "Contemporary Mexican Prints: From the Kyron Archives 1972-2004, currently on display at the Cairo Opera House's art gallery, has already traveled under the auspices of the Mexican Foreign Ministry to a handful of Asian capitals.

Betrix Vlady, co-founder of the Kyron exposition and curator of the show, hoped that show "would stimulate interest in contemporary Mexican art by people of different cultures.

Judging by the exhibited works of artists who are undoubtedly in tune with their Mexican heritage, Vlady should be content to know that "Kyron brilliantly succeeds in achieving this goal.

As far as the actual prints and lithographs are concerned, the exhibition is distinguished for its remarkable attention to detail.

The first pieces in the display are the works of Francisco Zúñiga, an artist known to be the best Mexican sculptor of his time. His lithographs show a skilled approach to light and shadows.

The subject of his work is predominantly women in simple yet emotionally charged settings. The "Women from Jchitan I (1974), for example is so skillfully executed that it merits further contemplation. The sadness and strength in his women is almost palpable, intensified by the delicacy of the lines used in their execution.

The flawless use of line the highlight of the exhibition.

Printmaking has always been considered a minor art-form compared to painting and drawing; a niche that is not as widely accepted as other art-forms. Perhaps that's why this exhibition is important; it plainly demolishes all preconceptions regarding printmaking. The intricacy of printmaking is unparalleled. Every single line, every spot of color, is done through a tedious long process that despite being painstaking for the artist is fascinating for the viewer.

Maximino Javier's lithographs are particularly fascinating. Miniature-like pieces packed with detail and color, the pieces demand the viewer to stand a nose length for proper inspection.

The subject here is an interesting concoction of composite creatures and fantastical stories, reminiscent of ancient children's book illustrations yet more disturbing; executed with a child-like innocence but heavy with adult connotations.

Equally uncanny are the works of Martín del Campo, a major advocate of Magic Realism. A versatile artist whose choice of media span from painting to silver casting, del Campo's most consistent field of visual expression is the art of the original print. His prints of circus characters are convoluted yet entertaining.

Similarly, Lucia Maya has gone to great lengths to include a staggering amount of detail in her work. Most of her exhibited pieces pay homage to Frida Kahlo, the Mexican artist and wife of pioneer Mexican muralist Diego Rivera. If one is to focus on the skill involved in creating these lithographs, the piece "The Other Two Fridas (1985) alone requires endless analysis.

On a similar note, the works of Rufino Tamayo show tremendous detail, but more importantly, they present what he believed

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On a similar note, the works of Rufino Tamayo show tremendous detail, but more importantly, they present what he believed to be an identity of traditional Mexico.

Tamayo has created a new type of print which he calls "Mixografía, which consists of artwork printed on paper, allowing for depth and texture. His pieces in the exhibition show depth and a controlled use of color only evident in the work of an experienced artist.

All of these works are quintessentially Mexican, in a way that is familiar even to those who have little knowledge of Mexican art and heritage. There is a sense of unity in the works illustrated in the tonality of color and attention to detail, despite their varied creators and subjects.

One could argue that this feeling of familiarity is rooted in the temperamental similarities between Mexican and Egyptian cultures.

There are a few surprising similarities of the works shown in this exhibit to those of Egyptian artists. For example, "The Tea Party (1980) by Javier closely resembles Zeinab El-Segeeny's work; the figural portraits of Zúñiga are reminiscent of Ahmed Fouad Selim's; and Tamayo's human rights portfolio is analogous to Mohamed Sharkawy' iconic pieces.

It's through these drawn parallels that we, as Egyptian viewers, are able to discover and comprehend the beauty of Mexican art.



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