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Religious Folk Art From the Southwest: Faces of Mary and the Saints

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Lydia Garcia

Exhibit ran till July 26, 2002

Lydia Garcia is for the most part a self-taught carver and painter. With vibrant Hispanic depiction of saints, her artwork evidences both traditional and imaginary interpretation of the *santera* art style. Using a variety of media in her creations this *santera* finds acrylic particularly suitable for the mutable colors to which she is drawn. Believing that living should include prayer, as well as humor and art, Garcia signs finished art pieces on the back and frequently adds a short prayer or explanation, often in both English and Spanish languages. Her work evidences the love and heart-sharing that speaks to her interest in the craft. Continuing to paint and sculpt in the same workspace (pueblo home) where she trained with her father, Lydia Garcia inspires others through her faith in God. With art reflecting her cultural heritage, along with an ingrained "beloved family members" relationship with the Virgin Mary, Jesus, and saints, Lydia Garcia continues to create for herself and the spirit within.

The *santero* art style of Lydia Garcia is unique to the Spanish colonial Southwest. Perceiving her artistic talent as a tool of God's love and compassion, Garcia sees her work as a way of giving herself back to God. Her prayers on the back of art pieces may have little to do with the images they accompany, but do reflect her own life and feelings: her joy, loneliness, sadness, etc. From scriptures that her father read to her when she was young, Garcia developed her own stories and prayers based on her belief in life after death and the help of saints during prayer. She feels that without these supplications her work is incomplete. Included among the twenty-four art pieces by Lydia Garcia being exhibited in The Marian Library are *retablos* (painted wooden votive offerings made in the form of religious pictures) and painted wooden altar screens or *reredos* (ornamental screens or partition walls located behind altars). True to the guidelines for the type of art Garcia creates, this former hairdresser and mother does not deviate from the symbols and stances that are expected of the saints and holy figures. For Garcia, such structure provides foundation for expressing the personal. To learn the basics of art is to listen to what is already in one's heart and to connect with that voice. This exhibit provides ample opportunity to see the results of this *santera's* trust of the day's rhythm and her everyday commitment to work. Savor the beauty of some favorite pieces that have developed their own personality in the artistic representations by Lydia Garcia of the faces of Mary and the holy saints.