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University of Dayton

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BLEND OF TRADITIONAL, NONTRADITIONAL NATIVITY SCENES IN UD CRÊCHE EXHIBITS DEPICT CHRISTMAS OF MANY CULTURES

DAYTON, Ohio — All the wise men are there, as are the requisite sheep, shepherds and angels. For some, however, the menagerie of animals and visitors to Jesus' manger birthplace wouldn't be complete without some alligators, raccoons, armadillos and, of course, a clarinet-playing jazzman.

Approximately 80 of the University of Dayton Marian Library's 900-crèche collection, representing countries and cultures around the globe, are now or will soon be on display at three Dayton locations during the holiday season. All exhibits are free and open to the public.

About 30 crèches, including the two-dimensional Cajun scene from Louisiana featuring alligators, armadillos and clarinet player, will be on exhibit at the Dayton Art Institute from Dec. 17 through Jan. 15. Exhibit hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, including Christmas day, with extended hours to 9 p.m. Thursdays.

Fifty of the nativity scenes have been divided between the Marian Library, located on the seventh floor of Roesch Library on campus, and the gallery at Bergamo Center, 4400 Shakertown Road. Hours at the Marian Library exhibit, on display now through November 2002, are 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays. Hours at the Bergamo exhibit, on display now through Jan. 13, are noon to 4 p.m. Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays.

For information on the exhibits, call the Marian Library at (937) 229-4214.

The crèches on display this year represent more than 20 countries in Eastern and Western Europe, Africa, North and South America and Asia. From form to media, color and design, the sets are as diverse and individualized as the heritage, vision and interpretation of the artists who created them.

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“A Musical Welcome,” gracefully carved from two-toned wood by a Togo artist, contrasts with “Hats Everywhere” from Mexico, a festive scene with multiple figures and landscape painted in vivid colors.

Some pieces are simple in design; others have been painstakingly created in elaborate detail. One such crèche, “A Global Village” from France, measures several feet wide and includes more than 65 characters to set the stage. The buildings in the scene have been roofed with hundreds of small, individually crafted clay tiles.

Some sets incorporate organic elements such as gravel, stone, brush, cork, bamboo and moss to create natural landscapes; others use household items such as wax and clothespins to set the scene.

All depict a very familiar Christmas scene — the birth of the baby Jesus.

St. Francis of Assisi, who used live animals to recreate the birth scene in 1223 in Rieti, Italy, is typically credited with the first nativity set, said Marian Library’s Marjorie Yefchak, coordinator of the exhibits.

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For media interviews, contact Marjorie Yefchak at (937) 229-1431 or via e-mail at marjorie.yefchak@notes.udayton.edu.