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TURTLES INSTEAD OF SHEEP, SOMBREROS FILLED WITH GIFTS OF FRUIT
ECLECTIC COLLECTION OF INTERNATIONAL NATIVITY SCENES ON DISPLAY

DAYTON, Ohio — Ecuadoran villagers carrying gifts of food to baby Jesus on their sombreros and Amazon Indians surrounded by snakes, turtles and lizards are two different examples of the nativity scene figures portrayed in this year’s Crèches International Exhibition.

More than 50 nativity sets owned by the University of Dayton’s Marian Library will be on display from Wednesday, Nov. 24, to Sunday, Jan. 9, at the Gallery St. John at Bergamo Center, 4400 Shakertown Road.

Gallery hours are Wednesday and Friday from 1 to 8 p.m. and Thursday, Saturday and Sunday from 1 to 5 p.m. General admission is $7 at the door and $5 when purchased in advance. Tickets for those, age 18 and under are $2 at the door and $1 in advance. Call (937) 229-3286 for advance tickets. The gallery will be open on Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s day.

UD’s Marian Library contains the world’s largest and most comprehensive collection of printed materials on Mary, the mother of Jesus. The library owns more than 800 nativity scenes.

Last year’s Crèches International Exhibit of 40 different nativity scenes will be on display again this year at the Marian Library, located on the seventh floor of Roesch Library. Admission is free and open to the public. The gallery is open 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

This year’s exhibition at Gallery St. John includes a wide range of scenes — from painted brown-and-black clay Amazon Indian figures of Mary and Joseph surrounded by snakes, lizards and turtles to an Ecuadoran village scene of more than 18 figures carrying gifts of fruits and vegetables to baby Jesus on their sombreros and back packs.

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Other examples in the exhibition include a simplistic portrayal of Mary, Joseph, Jesus, a shepherd and angel carved from one piece of wood. The piece, created by a Hungarian artist, is set in a bed of stone pebbles.

Another scene, created by an artist from Ghana, uses red clay figures and features Mary lying on her side with baby Jesus on the floor beside her. In another carved wood piece, created by Mexican artists with handicaps, large faceless figures are set in a rough hut carved from soft cork wood.

One of the smallest scenes in the exhibit is a Swiss crèche of small turned-wood figures. The knobby-headed figures are set against a simple chalet backdrop. In comparison, one of the larger scenes of the exhibit features foot-high painted clay figures of the three kings riding on an elephant, a horse and a camel.

The largest piece in the exhibit is a portion of a 5-by-11 foot crèche that depicts the history of salvation with a nativity scene at the center. Kevin Hanna, an artist from Norwalk, Conn., has been working on the 150-figure set piece over the past few years. Approximately 2/3 of the complete piece will be on display.

Several traditional nativity scenes are also included, such as American artist Linda MacDonald's figures of Mary, Joseph, Jesus, shepherds, kings and angels which are dressed in tiny cloth robes. There are also nativity scenes from collectible lines such a painted porcelain example from the Hummel collection. The exhibit will also include ceramic pots and tiles featuring paintings of the nativity as well as a collection of stables and houses.

According to the organizers, the origin of nativity sets goes back to St. Francis of Assisi in the 13th century. He was said to have used people and live animals to represent the Virgin Mary, Joseph, Jesus, angels and shepherds. Missionaries took the idea, along with handcrafted representations of the live version, to other countries. Eventually local features were incorporated in the statues, landscape and animals.

For more information, call Marjorie Yefchak, exhibit organizer, at (937) 229-4214 or (937) 320-5405. For media interviews, call the Rev. Johann Roten, S.M., director of the Marian Library-International Marian Research Institute at UD, at (937) 229-4214.