

Monday, March 30, 1981

Erika Ayala

Painting evolves from realism to abstract

By Lorraine McClish
staff writer

A Farmington Hills artist who says she was once only concerned with shape, precision and exactness now says the works she produces comes from "letting my mind wander, letting it go, enjoying it."

When Erika Ayala began painting in her native Colombia she termed her work as almost photographic. "There was no challenge any more. I was copying from nature or someone else. I really couldn't call the paintings mine," she said.

The precision-minded teen turned to

drafting as a career, then worked as a city planner for the National Geographical Institute in her South American town of Bosota until she left that position to come to the U.S.

As a young bride in a strange country with little command of the language, she described her urge to paint again as "almost like a calling."

"I was very lonely. I did not do much else except paint all day long," she said.

The evolution from almost-photographic to the abstract works that can be seen in Farmington Community Library throughout the month of April took 17 years.

MRS. AYALA is now vice president of Detroit's Palette and Brush Club and an active member of Farmington Artists Club who submits her works only in juried shows.

Architectural, drafting and design courses were pursued in the interim at LaSalle University in Chicago and Lawrence Institute of Technology here.

Watercolor, acrylics and design courses were taken in Birmingham-Bloomfield Arts Association, Oakland Community College and with a number of private teachers.

She's given one-woman exhibits in Colombia, stemming from trips back to South America to see her family there, and is now arranging for a private collection exhibit in the Museum of Modern Art, Caracas, Venezuela, this summer.

Of her commissioned works of art she is most proud of the stage designs and folkloric art renditions she did for Detroit International Institute's Freedom Festivals.

She prepares for at least four shows every year, but says she carries no strict work schedule.

"I go at it when the urge comes," she said. "The creativity is already within you. You extract the best of it from each teacher. Each brings out a little bit more. Then what I produce is my own. But I never stop learning."

MRS. AYALA favors strong colors.

"I am in love with color, happy colors. Maybe that's in keeping with my South American heritage," she says, adding that visits back to Colombia are reflected in many of her paintings.

One work that she is pleased with is called "Industry" which conveys the changes she sees in Bosota, her family's town.

"I think it tells the story well of the contrast between the calm mountains and lakes that are sitting side by side the new textile plants and emerald mine operations."

"The crafts industry is growing there too," she said. "Their crafts, all combined with great creativity, are very apparent."

Mrs. Ayala grew up surrounded by art and was influenced in great part by her grandfather, Juan Antonio Sanchez, who was well known for his paintings both in South America and Europe.

"He influenced a lot of us," she said. "When I think of it I can hardly believe how many cousins I have who are artists or in art-related fields."

Some of Mrs. Ayala's pieces in Farmington Hills Community Library are acrylics, some are watercolors, and some watercolor with collage.

The library is at 32737 12 Mile Road.



Erika Ayala works in her home studio with a schedule that calls for at least four shows a year. Her work will be seen throughout the month of April in a one-woman show in Farmington Hills Community Library. (Staff photo by Randy Borst)



Bright colors have become almost a trade mark of Erika Ayala's paintings. "Thoughts in Flight" (above) and "Beyond Now" (below) are both done in rich watercolor with tissue paper used for the textured collage. (Staff photo by Randy Borst)



Artists are ready for the show

Farmington Artists Club has set the date for its spring exhibit in the formal lounge, Mercy Center, that has become the traditional site for the show in recent years.

Show hours are 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. April 24-25 and from noon to 5 p.m. April 26.

Admission is without charge.

The club expects about 120 artists will be represented in the juried and open galleries. The show also features a budget gallery of unframed works.

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New Miss Michigan United sought

By Lorraine McClish
staff writer

Entries are now being accepted from young women for the Miss Michigan United Beauty Pageant.

"This is a beauty contest that opens doors for women from 17-28 years; the same pageant that opened the door for Lynda Carter (Wonder Woman) and Marj Wallace who made her name in TV commercials," said Cynthia Guenther, 1975 pageant winner, who took over the directorship of the pageants four years ago.

Closer to home, Carolyn Tolley, the titleholder from Farmington Hills, who gives up her crown in June, now makes her living as a model as a result of the pageant. She is narrator for the Detroit Auto Show, has been chosen as an English Leather calendar girl and can be seen in Waterbed Gallery and General Motors commercials.

"Wendy Martin (of Redford) didn't make the finals last year but she was seen by a photographer in the audience and is now in Penney's catalog and does fashion modeling for Saks," Ms. Guenther said.

"Rene Bowes, another who didn't make the finals, from Walled Lake, is traveling with Chrysler's auto show. Every girl benefits some way by being seen and meeting people in show business who are part of the pageant and part of the round of parties and interviews the week before the pageant."

ENTRY FORMS will be sent on request by contacting the pageant headquarters at 271-8783. Other than meeting the age requirements, pageant contenders must never have been married and must be a resident of Michigan or attending school here.

The pageant will be staged on the evening of Wednesday, June 24 in Detroit's 20 Grand Club. Entry deadline is June 7.

The new Miss Michigan United will receive the use of a new car, from Re-

naissance Ford in Detroit, and a \$1,500 John Robert Powers modeling school scholarship.

She will get a complete professional model portfolio and portfolio case from Tom McVickers, who is the official pageant photographer. McVickers' model entry recently took first place in Cosmopolitan's 1981 Cosmo Girl contest.

The winner will receive a personal audition from Ford Motor Company for work in the Detroit, New York and Chicago auto shows, and a weekend vacation for two at Northern Michigan Chateau.

She will be awarded a gold-and-diamond Russian fanlike necklace and a gown from Kay's Bridal to wear for public appearances.

"And there is another long string of prizes for the runners-up," Ms. Guenther said.

MS. GUENTHER has just patented her own trademark name, Miss Michigan United, and is rapidly expanding her base of operations in Michigan to go nationwide.

"When I do this I will be the first woman pageant director in the U.S. and maybe the world. All of them are directed by men now," she said.

Winning the pageant title six years ago, coupled with training at the Specs Howard School of Broadcast Arts, acted as a springboard to her work as hostess for Michigan, the Michigan state lottery WWJ-TV show.

Now she travels extensively as a model and narrator for Ford Motor Company and is actively involved in photographic modeling and TV commercial work.

Her pageant draws from 80-100 young women a year and holds the reputation as one of the most prestigious of its kind in the U.S.

"I took advantage of the pageant and everything it could do for me," she said. "If the girl is serious about a show

business career, the pageant can help her. Photographers and spotters from talent agencies are always in the audience on pageant night."

Ms. Guenther, former pageant

winners and a back stage crew of six help prepare the contestants for their on-stage appearance. Ms. Guenther works with winners through the year helping them in their chosen career.



Carolyn Tolley, 1980-81 titleholder of Miss Michigan United and a Farmington Hills resident, gives up her crown to the winner of this season's pageant on June 24.