

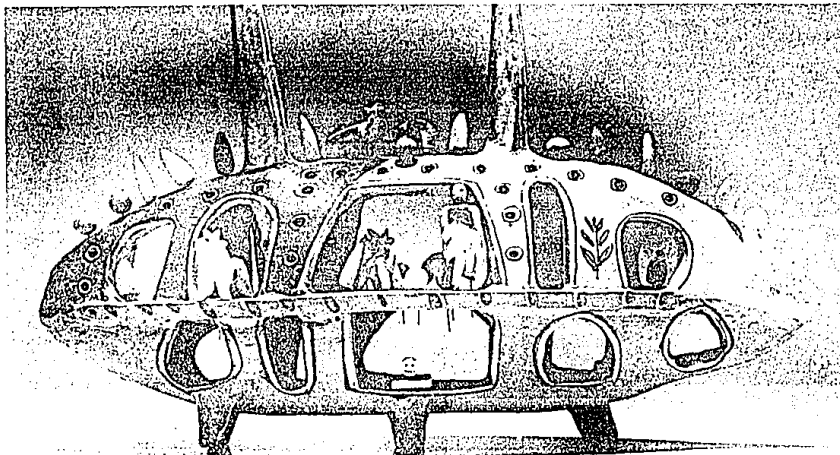
Creative Living

Marie McGee editor/591-2300



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The peacock blue papier mache skull has polka dot eye sockets and is brilliantly decorated with images, which are all part of Mexican folklore.

One of the more humorous works of folk art is Noah's Ark, done in papier mache, complete with clay figures. The shape, more than traditional boat-shaped, makes it particularly appealing.

By Manon Meilgaard
special writer

WHEN MEXICAN poet Juan Coronel, grandson of Diego Rivera, was invited to dinner, he was amazed by the quality, artistry and variety of his hosts' displays of modern Mexican folk art. This impression is shared by all who have seen this superb collection in the Detroit home of Linda and Michael Margolin.

Approximately 250 pieces by prominent Mexican artists and artisans from many diverse regions are artistically displayed en masse on two walls of the living room — spilling over to smaller groupings in the dining room and hall.

It is like having the nose pressed against a shop window crammed with delights. The panoply includes sculptures, constructions, masks, animals, angels, fruits, skeletons, skulls, candelabra, pottery, figurines in regional dress, crucifixes and numerous religious/pantheistic images that reflect an Aztec past and the Spanish influence in an artform that is supremely Mexican.

THE MATERIALS are mostly clay, tin, papier mache and wood and the colors literally leap into the room. As Linda Margolin aptly puts it, "It (Mexican folk art) is a celebration of life."

It is also in some ways, a celebration of death. This subject is not a gloomy one in the Mexican mentality. Images of death constantly occur in Mexican art. The Margolins own several samples of skulls representing "el Dia de los Muertos" (the Day of the Dead) when on Nov. 5 it is the custom to visit family graves and make presents of edible sugar skulls.

One beauty recently acquired by the Margolins is of peacock-blue papier mache, with polka-dot eye-sockets, brilliantly decorated with a cactus, birds, flowers, a frog and a snail — the last five

also symbolic images in Mexican folklore.

The collection contains many fine candelabra. Some in unpainted tin or terra-cotta and others in polychrome earthenware ornamented with Adam and Eve figures are surrounded by cherubs and small animals — a Garden of Eden fantasy in mouthwatering, sugar-icing colors.

To underline the inherent humor in much of Mexican folk art, there is a delightful Noah's Ark in papier mache, complete with minute clay figures, which looks more like a submarine or an airship.

And although every single piece is a cherished item, one of Michael Margolin's favorites is a graceful 2½-foot-high statue in terra-cotta of a woman in Tehuan dress — the kind of attire that Rivera's wife, artist Frida Kahlo, habitually wore.

The Margolin collection originated with the purchase of a poster depicting examples of modern folk art, designed by former Detroit Alexander Girard at a New York textile and objects exhibition.

The couple's interest was further sparked by a visit to Fort Lauderdale, where they came across a little import shop owned by an American woman who, Linda says, "always wore Mexican dress and was as crazy as a loon, but she certainly knew her Mexican art." Perhaps it was the combination of hot Florida sunshine," she adds, "... it was so alive."

Michael is equally enthusiastic. "The colors and sculptural forms were unique." They were hooked.

Thus began the acquisition of a few pieces in the late '60s, which has grown into the present vast collection. It was started for fun, but lately the Margolins have been seriously cataloguing the works.

THEY USUALLY BUY through dealers. The quality of the work is comparable to that found

in the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (National Museum of Popular Arts and Crafts) in Mexico City and has little or nothing to do with the tawdry souvenirs and crude copies of pre-Columbian art proffered to unknowing or hapless tourists.

For the Margolins, who are very much part of the Detroit art community, art, artists and collecting is almost an axiom. Linda is a curatorial assistant in the education department of the Detroit Institute of Arts (she will embark on a course of study on Mexican art in Mexico later this year) and Michael is supervisor of medical social services at Sinai Hospital and a free-lance writer on subjects pertaining to art, opera and dance theatre.

Apart from the Mexican collection, the Margolin home is a virtual museum of paintings, sculptures, prints and photographs by Detroit artists.

Will the collection of modern Mexican folk art ever be seen by the general public? Happily, yes. News of the collection Mexicana is beginning to seep out and it (or part of it) will be exhibited at the Muskegon Museum of Art from Nov. 22, 1987, to Jan. 31, 1988. A date to remember.

As Michael says, "Most people think folk art is generic, and while this is essentially true, Mexican artists have a style and tradition which is uniquely their own."

Manon Meilgaard has a special interest in art and theater. She was born in England and presently lives in Birmingham.

Staff photos by
Bill Bresler



Linda and Michael Margolin worked their way from casual to major collectors of Mexican folk art. And they have obviously enjoyed their journey into this intimate part of the lives of our colorful neighbors to the south. That's a Frida Kahlo mask next to her.

Writer helps us all enjoy creating art

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

Carolyn Hall is a great one for sharing her talents in and enjoyment of art. If she can do it, she maintains you can, too.

To that end, she has just completed her seventh book, "The A to Z of Soft Animals," published by Prentice Hall Press. And she will be at Borders Book Store, 31150 Southfield (at 13 Mile), Birmingham, Saturday, noon to 1:30 to talk (1 p.m.) and autograph copies of the \$14.95 soft cover book.

The book contains instructions, patterns and pictures for making 26 stuffed animals corresponding to the letters of the alphabet starting with armadillo and ending with zebra.

She emphasizes that all patterns are full-size because even the most advanced sewer may run into problems when enlarging the patterns.

She also warns the sewer to follow directions precisely — attempts to wing it usually end in disaster, because there's more to attaching ears,

arms and legs to stuffed bodies than seems immediately apparent.

ACTUALLY, HALL SPENT more than a year getting the bugs, so to speak, out of butterflies (B)aguans (I), nuthatches (N) turtles (T) and assorted wildlife. In the research process, (she doesn't take her stuffed zoo lightly) she learned a great deal about each of her 26 subjects and she shares some of that with her readers.

"My kids say I'm the greatest trivia fan on earth," she said, after mentioning that the armadillo is the only animal to have identical offspring, the scallopp has a shell ringed with 30 to 40 blue eyes that can see danger and penguins and rabbits have pink eyes.

In her supply cupboard on all four walls of her home studio, she has more than 100 different kinds of eyes. Another cupboard holds the fur (fake) collection and many more are full of plain and printed fabrics.

The smaller frog is the only one I anthropomorphized (slight tilt to the head not natural to a frog). I tried to

be as honest to them as I could," she said.

With the exception of the unicorn, Hall said all are legitimate animals and "all are North American."

BECAUSE SHE'S AN ARTIST and a photographer as well as writer and soft sculpture expert, her patterns begin with sketches or photographs. Since Hall's been involved in the geometries of pattern making through many of her previous books, she has it down to a science.

Hall says she keeps doing the books for several reasons, one of the most important being that she enjoys the variety of skills demanded — researching, pattern drafting, writing, sewing, photographing and, of course, proof-reading.

With each new book (she's now working on number eight), she said, "Once I get into it, I realize how much I like doing it."

The animals pictured in "The A to Z of Soft Animals" will be on display at Borders Book Store on Saturday. From there they will go to the children's room at Baldwin Library.



DAN DEAN/staff photographer

Carolyn Hall poses with her larger than life frog, which could be considered the grandfather for the smaller frog in her new book, "The A to Z of Soft Animals." The spider monkey, one of the stars of the new book, made with wood and wire armatures, is a versatile little guy who can grip, bend and change positions.