



MEET THE ARTIST: A DISCUSSION WITH MARIJOSE TERÁN GUARDIA

Alegria's First Sponsored Artist Shares Her Inspiration

By Alana Morris

Marijose Terán Guardia walks into the room and she is much smaller than I imagined. Her painting, titled “Guanacaste,” which will be the first painting to hang in The Gallery at Alegria, is of a woman with a significant presence that can be felt from across the room. This led me to assume that Marijose would be... bigger somehow. But as soon as she begins to speak, I realize I have underestimated Marijose—despite her small stature she is equal in significance to her painting and has a passion for life and for art that is fiery and extremely contagious.

Marijose is the first sponsored artist of the Alegria Center for the Arts, a non-profit foundation dedicated to the support and development of arts and culture in Costa Rica that will be supported by the homeowners of Alegria, in addition to friends and supporters of the arts from all over the world. The Center's primary mission will be The Artist-in-Residence Program and the community's Gallery which will be home to a permanent collection of Costa Rican art. The Alegria Center for the Arts is an opportunity to give something back to the people of Costa Rica and provide a haven for the nation's artists to express their cultural identity.

A graduate of the University of Costa Rica with a Baccalaureate in Plastic Arts with Painting emphasis, Marijose has always known that she wanted to be an artist. Originally interested in graphic design, Marijose began painting while at University and has painted every day of her life since then.

“There have been years I have been involved in other things, like working in tourism and taking a break when I had my two daughters, but if I don’t paint I get anxious and my hands start itching,” Marijose said. “Painting is not something I *do*, it’s something I *am*.”

Marijose enjoys watching people develop their own art and helping to develop it in her children as well as other artists. Her eyes light up when she describes her own daughters (ages nine and six) collaborating with her, making collages and learning their mother’s craft. However, sometimes, she says, art is very misunderstood.

“Too often, people say ‘I need to put something on that wall’ versus really *feeling* the art,” she says. “A lot of times art is simply explained instead of truly felt.”

Those who buy Marijose’s work are of the latter group and she says most have a strong reaction one way or another to any given piece. She uses a lot of women in her work, much like the woman in “Guanacaste” to be displayed in Alegría’s Gallery. Marijose says these women are there to communicate, not as decoration and not to be perfect specimens of the female body, but to express feelings to those who look upon it. This is a recurring theme in Marijose’s work.

“I use the image of women because it is what I’m familiar with,” says Marijose. “The woman in the Alegría painting represents the true womanly spirit of Costa Rica. This woman is feminine. She is a real woman with feelings and a connection with nature. She is sensual but not sexual. She simply makes beautiful the space that surrounds her.”

Nature is another primary theme in Marijose’s work, as it is for many Costa Rican artists. Costa Rica and nature go hand-in-hand as the country conjures up for many the images of vibrant colors, permeating sunshine, beautiful birds and an endless array of flowers and plants. For Marijose, the nature that surrounds her is part of her life’s experience and therefore a part of her, and a part of her art. In fact, this affinity for nature in Costa Rican art is a central reason why Marijose was eager to be involved in The Alegria Center for Arts. She hopes to explore how art can speak to the real Costa Rica and not only what a tourist might see during a one-week vacation.

“I feel a deep connection to Alegría’s Center for the Arts because it allows me the opportunity to communicate what Costa Rica is through my art, and with depth, not just the superficial things that tourists might see,” she said.

Marijose also looks forward to having a part in inspiring Costa Rican artists through The Alegría Center for the Arts and helping them to grow, both as artists and as Costa Ricans.

“When you are surrounded by people who are creating, the inspiration just continues to grow. An artistic environment like the Alegría Center for the Arts where artists can learn and share experiences is a very unique thing,” she said.