

FEATURE

Nicaraguan Arts: the struggle carries on



by Daniel Judd

"Once there was a massacre in the Western Highlands. Three days later the guerillas arrived to see what had happened.

When they got there they found a huge pile of bodies. Then they heard what they thought at first was a dog. But then they heard a cry. They went to see and found a child who was sucking from the breast of his dead mother. They picked him up, they bathed him and they took him with them.

We have this child and now he is seven years old."

I sat cross legged on the floor and listened to their story.

There were a lot of facts: Facts that shape the history of the place they call home. Mostly, I thought about what I was going to ask next. About how I could match their courage with understanding, and their longing with insight.

In the end I just sat there and listened.

The event was the ninth annual Aid to the Arts of Nicaragua. It ran its week long stay at the I.D.A Gallery quietly, celebrating its greatest success since its birth in 1982.

"We're trying the most humble, simple and direct way to make a difference."

It was during this year that professor George Manupelli and Eugene Tellez began to draw together the energies of both faculty and students within the Fine Arts community at York. Since that time, they have faithfully donated works for sale, and the proceeds have been pooled to pur-

chase art supplies for the people of Nicaragua.

"We're not satisfied that the world is just," said Manupelli. "We're trying in the most humble, simple and direct way to make a difference."

In the past, members of the faculty have made the trip to Nicaragua personally to deliver the gifts of pencils, paper, brushes and paint. Although the Nicaraguan government has undergone some radical changes in the past year, and the previous support they enjoyed has waned, it is hoped that this tradition might continue.

And there was the voice of the newcomers to the show, Carlos and Tony. The artwork around them spoke strongly of concern and compassion, however it was the crafts they displayed that told the story of a real and tangible struggle.

The two were both originally from Guatemala. They brought along with them crafts which had been made by fellow Guatemalans around the world; brightly woven vests made by some of the thousands of Guatemalan refugees in Mexico and delicate shawls, the work of widows' hands at home.

"The meaning of this clothing is important," said Carlos. "When you wear these, you help to create a sense of solidarity with the people of Nicaragua."

Their show grew over the course of the week to include a collection of paintings by Carlos' brother. Barren and simple, they were filled with a history that pushed beyond the reach of the canvas. I was told that one of the paintings expressed the story of how his wife was killed by government forces in Guatemala.

"Many people that come to shows like this leave with a better understanding of what's happening in Central America," said Carlos. "More shows like this need to

be organized, especially in the university communities."

Carlos also talked about the government forces in the Guatemalan schools who dress like everyone else, but watch for the seeds of discontent.

"I left Guatemala," said Tony, (not his real name) "because people around me were being kidnapped."

In the eyes of the United Nations, fear was not a valid reason for leaving his country.

Of the 200,000 Guatemalan refugees now in Mexico, only 50,000 possess landed immigrant status. The rest have chosen to take on names like Tony to escape the fear.

"... help to create a sense of solidarity with the people of Nicaragua."

Tony, Carlos and their people now face a formidable task; returning the rule of their country to the common people and out of the hands of the powerful. Dialogues are now taking place around the world in order to make this a reality.

"Justice should be for all," said Carlos. "Not just for the students or the widows or the refugees."

It was last February said Manupelli, that the popular F.S.L.N party was deposed in Nicaragua. The Nicaraguans now too face an extreme challenge. The present U.N.O government is attempting to return power to the minority business class.

What I have told you is only half of what was spoken. The other half lies in the art, the crafts and in the faces. I could explain, but that would simply mean more words, and less reality.

The situation should not be explained, only told. It's in the story that we find the real agony; the explanation just gives us the freedom to turn away.

Last year, the Aid to the Arts of Nicaragua Show was able to provide the children, art students, and artists of Nicaragua with many supplies. And because of a cash donation from the Toronto Catholic Teacher's Union, it was also able to expand care in supplying toys, games and medicine to a day-care centre at a crafts co-operative for battered women and the children's hospital in Managua.

This year, the show's organizers have been asked to participate in the founding of the New Institute of the Americas for Political and Social Studies.



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