

Artist Lydia Garcia has been blessed. Certainly, she is highly successful. Garcia's Hispanic folk art is included in museum collections and exhibited at several galleries throughout the U.S., and like many other artists, her success did not come without struggle. Yet what is most impressive about Garcia is her sense of grace. She possesses such an abounding faith, so genuine and rich, that she freely shares her gifts with others, inspiring family, friends, students and collectors alike.

When an artist's spirit transcends its medium and travels deep into the hearts of viewers where spirits connect and souls meet, something magical takes place. This happening is not about technique or composition or color. In fact, words are not adequate to describe the joy created when love is freely shared. "What matters to me is that a piece really sticks to the heart," Garcia says. "My work is not what I do for myself but how it makes you feel."

Perhaps a key to understanding the artist's strength can be found in the private altar located in Garcia's combination home, studio and gallery in Ranchos de Taos. That altar stands as a tribute to her parents, Elias and Inez, for whom her gallery is named. "It is a scene of the crucified Jesus with Mary Magdalene. It is made from my mother's old Santos. I carved part of it," Garcia says. "There are a lot of recycled things in it, wigs from my beauty salon. Mary Magdalene also has pearls. I have a lot of fun with my art. But I'm also serious, and I celebrate everything."

The altar, once exhibited at the Millicent Rogers Museum, has taken on a special significance since the death of Garcia's parents. "It really has become more alive to me. I know they are resting with God, but I share their spirit."

Garcia was born into a strong Catholic family; her father was in *Los Hermanos de La Morada*. Although life was hard in an isolated community, the family had spirit, faith and a rich legacy that sustained them. "When the Hispanics came, they brought ideas and dreams that were in their hearts," Garcia says. "There was no material, so they utilized what was in the area. One thing that was here was wood, tin came a lot later. The mirrors came way after that. I was brought up that way."

Garcia learned of her culture and heritage from stories told by her father and grandfather. She learned how to read in the home where she was born and now lives. "My father would read Scripture to us. He would tell us you can travel in books," Garcia recalls.

Garcia raised four children and supported them while working as a hair

LYDIA GARCIA

PRIVATE ALTARS

Story & Photos By Sara Ford



ALTAR SCREEN BY TAOS ARTIST LYDIA GARCIA

"I love St. Francis and he loves to be painted and there are the innocents, the animals and baby angels." Garcia also writes little scriptures about the saints, angels and animals on the back of each piece.

Like the Hispanics who came before her, Garcia uses materials on hand. Old doors, discarded

wood or tin, some left on her driveway by friends, are utilized. "I like working with old things. It takes me to a different dimension. After I've finished painting, I put them outside and let them sit for days. God provides the rain and snow and sun that I need to finish the work for me."

Although she is well over 65, Garcia has no plans to slow down. "God has blessed me with good health and I really try to serve my God with my art. And with the talent he has given me,"

To that end her annual Christmas Show, kicked off with a Christmas Tree Skirt Auction and Benefit on Nov. 29th. The show runs through Jan 15th and skirts not sold

still can be purchased. Donations can be made anytime. The proceeds will benefit Taos Feeds Taos and Toys For Tots.

Galleria EliasInez/ Studio de Lydia is located on the High Road to Chimayo, 7208 Highway 518, Ranchos de Taos, 758-1486.

stylist. "All along I did art, painting whatever was in my heart. I never thought it was art that should be sold. It was just giving witness to my life, my children and my God for all the blessings he had given all my family."

She discovered, quite by accident, that her art had appeal. While in law school her eldest son sold his mother's paintings to pay for dental work. Instead of being angry as her son feared she would be, Garcia was grateful that he received needed care and that her art would sell. "It was then that I realized that maybe there was something here," she says.

Garcia was encouraged by others in the Taos art community, including artists Ray Vinella, Larry Bell and Jim Wagner and Act I Gallery owner, Anita Ellison. In fact, Vinella told Garcia that she had something very special, a gift she should not lose. Eventually, she gave up her beauty salon and concentrated full time on her art, becoming a well known Santera, a religious artist, whose retablos delighted people from all regions and all walks of life.

Garcia still paints from the heart. "I never know what is going to come out, but working is like having a person whom I love and who loves me back," she says.

Some themes remain favorites.



FINISHING TOUCHES ON GARCIA RETABLO



LYDIA GARCIA