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Q&A: Art Professor Marián Ichaso Lefeld

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Dallas College Art professor Marián Ichaso Lefeld's art collection *Tierra de Garcia* is being displayed at the Latino Cultural Center in Dallas, Texas now through March 14. Professor Lefeld sits down with Et Cetera reporter Zhiné Torres to discuss her exhibition, student advice, creative safe spaces, and Venezuelan background culture.

Q. When was the first time you fell in love with art?

A. I do not have a first time. This is something that has always happened. It has always been my life in one way or another.

Q. What is your earliest memory of when you knew that creative arts was something that you loved and would pursue eventually?

A. I was incredibly young like, in kindergarten and I was following some shapes inside of this bubble. I remember clearly it was blue and I started drawing a house and my teacher reprimanded me and said, no, you cannot do that. You need to just cover the whole shape and I was like, well, why? I wanted to hide some things in what was being colored. It felt as if I were getting into trouble. So that can spark a question or why does art that have to be one way?

Q. I saw on your website you are from Caracas, Venezuela. Can you describe the culture back home?

A. Well, we are on the coast of the Caribbean and the coast of Venezuela. It is the northernmost country of South America, and it is a beautiful country. It is diverse, heterogeneous, and interesting. It has every single climate, it has the beach, it has mountains, it has planes. There's even right now, rapidly melting glaciers. Two glaciers left in on the west side of the country and a little bit of a part of the Amazon Forest. It is remarkably diverse in terms of its geography, and its beautiful people tend to have a good sense of humor.

Q. Do you feel that your culture is represented in your artwork?

A. Of course, I make paintings about Caracas. They are the city and its buildings, different neighborhoods in different areas that I am quite familiar with.

Q. In your journey has anyone helped you or inspired you in your artistic or professional career?

A. Yes, I have had great professors and I started painting at Brookhaven College, a nontraditional student. My professors were good friends, and they are good friends now, and are very encouraging and helpful to me. I was a young mother and had two little girls back then and I was a nontraditional student, yet the system helped. The professors I encounter at Brookhaven, some of them still work there.

Q. Are there any messages that you want people to gain from your artwork?

A. Yes, there are a few specifically. The awareness of some important themes in the history and recent history of my country.

Q. I also saw a statement on your website, and it stated “It is not down in any map. True places never are.” Herman Melville, Moby-Dick. Could you explain to me just a little bit what that means?

A. You have been one of the lucky ones who have been raised and lived all your life in one place, right? And there are many cultural shifts or political shifts in Venezuela. There have been momentous changes in every aspect, and that is one of the reasons why I am also here in the US.

Q. When was the last time you visited?

A. Late summer 2018

Q. When you went back in late summer, did that inspire you a little bit more in your work?

A. It is like the place that I carry with me.

Q. Looking back at your younger self at 18 years old, what advice would you give yourself?

A. Don't be so hard on yourself. That is what I would tell myself.
Be a little bit kinder to you.

Q. Do you have any advice that you would give to young aspiring artists?

A. I would say this is a marathon. It is not a sprint. So, we are in for the long haul, and you are in it for yourself not to please anyone, just yourself. It is a great profession in the sense that we are always learning and, in any profession, and always studying, always seeing what you know

about the culture. So, think about art as sort of the evidence or a tangible outcome of a particular culture. If art reflects who we are, my goodness, I mean, what an interesting, complex area to be in. Well, of course, there are practical aspects to it. In terms of like how you can make a living well, you can go into teaching or no, but I have known great baristas, great bartenders that have also become talented artists, and they are not my friends and are in museums. People who are, you know, represented, and had fantastic careers. What is important is just to be engaged in our culture in what we do. A lot of us are makers and cannot stop moving things with our hands.

Q. What audience or lane do you think your artwork was created for? Do you have a target audience? If so, who is your preferred targeted audience?

A. I do it mostly for me and sort of the questions that I have. I try to answer them through images. That is how I process information a lot of the time. I do not think I have an audience per day, to be honest with you, I have a big showcase right now the Latino Cultural Center, called *Tierra de Garcia* and I encourage everyone to see and visit and see what I have to say. Link: <https://artandseek.org/calendar/event/109622/marian-ichaso-lefeld-tierra-de-gracia> Tickets are free until March 19, 2022.

Marian Lefeld in conversation with curator Silvia Benedetti.
Facebook live, Saturday, February 19th, 2022 at 11:00 AM CST
https://m.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=sharing&v=490533012695617&_rdr

Q. Why did you choose which Richland campus to teach art?

A. Richland chose me. Almost nine years ago I started working here now. I have loved it ever since and I happen to be in the right place at the right time. It has been a beautiful experience for me. I've taught hundreds of students and it has just been so enriching to me. I love teaching.

Q. What is your teaching style?

A. Especially in my studio classes, I think in my theory classes as well, my teaching style is one of the ways to allow for the creation of a community. Right? We are a group of people we are all learning, including myself. I am the one that is learning the most, that is the secret of teaching and that is why I love it so much. It is just creating a community of creating a safe space for everyone to find their way of their own visual vocabulary, visual style, visual way of approaching images and pushing paint around surface creating designs. To try and to create allows for the space for people to listen to themselves.

Q. Did you face any difficulties with your art during COVID-19?

A. Yes and no. On the one hand, it was great to have that space that I was talking about and having a little bit more of a longer day to focus on my studio practice. And on the other hand, it was quite isolating. Being an artist already isolated enough. As you are working,

or at least myself as a painter and working in my studio. It is always nice to have people coming over or going out and having discussions talking about the latest theory and reading or the book that I am reading or so that was that was a challenge that isolation. I think at the time opened to create more work.

Q. Was there any point in time you thought art was not for you?

A. Nodding no

That has not been my experience....

It is, how do I make, what kind of career, how can I earn a living that will allow me to continue making the art was more of my question, right?

Q. What do you want your students to walk away with after taking your classes?

A. Just a little bit more confidence in their own ability to make work and to be humble enough to know that we still are learners that was still seeking in seeking knowledge and seeking information. That there we can really achieve an extraordinarily rich life, and this does not just go to those students who are pursuing careers in the arts. Also, the knowledge of or knowing that, as we make things up, we are thinking about art and art as a product of a particular culture. Artists are a product of our own humanity. Critical thinking to me is particularly important in terms of what thing, what students can learn from experiences of being in my classroom and just feeling a little bit more comfortable, that we are all in here learning there is no one better than the other. You can have a little bit more ability. You would like to be a little bit more popular, fashionable, but that does not mean anything, right, in the greater scheme of things.