

ART REVIEW

HEAT LIGHT COLOR

Promega displays vibrant, fabulistic Latin art

By Jacob Stockinger

The Capital Times

FITCHBURG - If certain things come to mind when you think of Hispanic art - say, bright colors and folklore themes - you won't be disappointed with "Art With a Latin Flair," a show that runs through Aug. 27 at Promega's BioPharmaceutical Technology Center.

The center is at 5445 E. Cheryl Parkway, about 2 1/2 miles south of the Beltline and left off Fish Hatchery Road.

But you will also find some unexpected and eye-catching aspects of Latin-inspired art in this very viewer-friendly display.

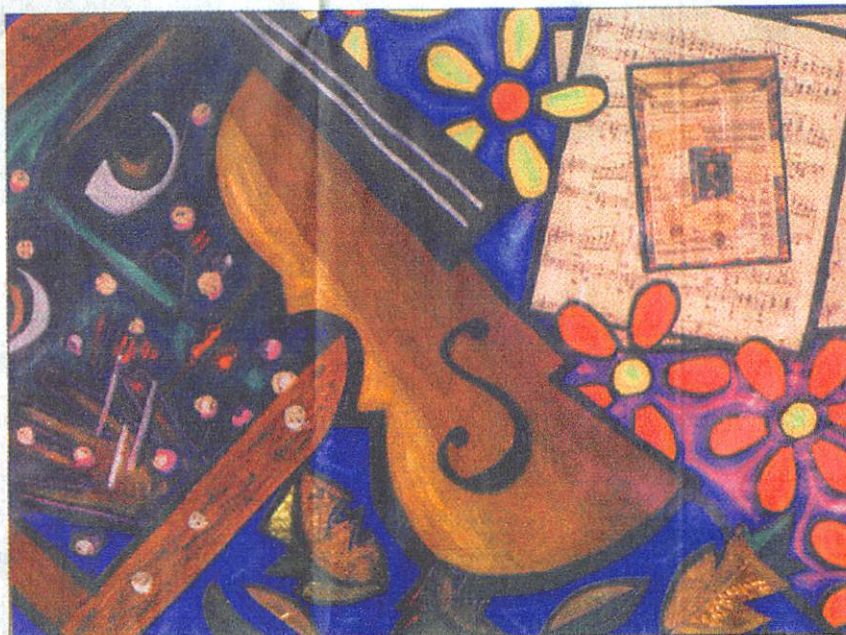
You will find the large organically dyed geometric tapestries of Wence Martinez, who lives and works in Door County, hanging in the main atrium. Most are bright, but the standout work uses subtle natural tones of creams, tans, browns and grays.

Down a long corridor, half hidden in the back of the building, you will also find three dozen black-and-white photographs by Martinez that document the town he came from in Mexico, where women still pound corn and stir enormous kettles. They help contextualize the more vibrant paintings by other artists that often partake of Latin American "magic realism" and help ground it in everyday life.

Perhaps most interesting of all is the work of Eve Whitaker, who is not herself Latino but who has been deeply influenced by the culture and politics. She has painted an impressive series of small death masks. But her most moving work incorporates those smaller images into a larger painted woodcut that depicts grieving women, soldiers and men who have been hanged. To find such strong politics with such subtle aesthetics recalls the tradition of the great Mexican muralists.

It's also not by chance that when you enter the subdued chrome-and-gray wall industrial interior of the building, you come across the brightly colored canvases of Maria Zenetta. In her statement, Zenetta speaks of their meaning as fables of feminism and female identity. To the ordinary viewer, the fables are less obvious than the bright colors (neon greens and oranges, vibrant violets and reds) and creative use of different materials to construct her eye-catching collages.

On the second floor is a series of paintings of fabulistic animals, united by a blue bird, by Francisco Mora. He incorporates a child-like simplicity - not surprising for an artist who illustrates children's books.



The Promega show includes a variety of vibrant art, including the work of Francisco Mora (top right), Maria Zenetta (above), Eve Whitaker (below left) and Wence Martinez (below right).



The show flows with a naturalness that hides the effort that went into it. "I started with a list of preconceptions," says Phoenix-based curator Daniel Swadener, who - knowing his own limitations when it came to Hispanic art - sought help from the Wisconsin Arts Board's Mark Fraire, who specializes in Hispanic art. "I had envisioned strong images and vivid colors, and I think I got them," Swadener says. "So I'm really pleased with the results. But they're not all subject to the politics of the genre, and I really like that too. I like

the variety of texture and color and the way all four artists mix it up. It makes for a great summer show."

He's right. This art, like the culture it comes from and represents, demands a blindingly strong light, not the grayness of a Wisconsin winter, to set it off.

Indeed, this art makes even the sunniest day sunnier, yet carries within it the suggestions of oppressive heat - both literal and figurative - that fuses economic poverty with cultural wealth.

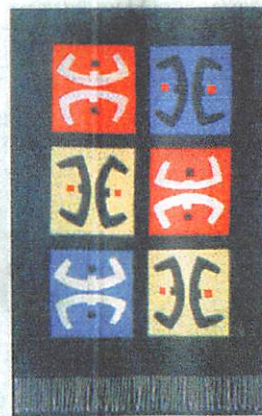
There's no denying that demographics also play a role in this show. Last year's national census revealed a surprising and dramatic increase in the number of Hispanic-Americans living here and elsewhere.

"There's a pretty good-sized Latino community in Madison," says Swadener. "And one of the things Promega likes to do is to reach out to the community."

The company also sees larger purposes in exhibiting this art.

"Having a diversity of ideas and cultures fuels innovation, and that's a priority at Promega," says Diane Schwartz, a corporate communications coordinator. "There's a huge emphasis on creativity here."

Especially while this show is on display.



Art With a Latin Flair

The Promega gallery, which admits the public free of charge, is open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., or by appointment, especially for group tours. Call (608) 277-2669. Prices for the art run from \$135 to \$45,000.