Manuel Santana

Angelina y Samuel, 1999

Xilograph, 11” x 8”

Let’s Get Personal

Cultural Heritage: My cultural heritage is Mexican American.

Mentored by: Studied Painting and Composition with Martin Lubner, Morton Dimonstein, Arnold Mesches (all Los Angeles Painters).

Education/Training: East Los Angeles Junior College (1948-1950), Los Angeles State College (1950-1952), Scholarship to Otis Art Institute (Parsons Art Institute) (1952-1954)

Influences: The Spanish artist from the 1700s, Goya, and German artist from the 20th century, Max Beckmann

Tell Young Artists: That artists can become leaders is this world: “Artists can teach us a more creative language with sensitivities for those nuances that are not always understood but very often express the energy of our communities. As artists we must also now begin to facilitate the enlightenment of paths that lead to the creation of new forms and institutions that will save us from the banality and fratricides of our common existence.”

Here’s the Artwork

Art Medium: Xilograph

Intent of the Work: Much of today’s Mexican-American art is mainly categorized by the identity of the painters and by their references to specific social and “politically correct” consciousness. But Santana is a skilled and talented artist that brings his total experience and intuitively makes artistic—historical, mythical, emotional—and sometimes bold political comments and satire.

Unique Skills: Lithograph on Masonite. Manuel Santana was a prolific printmaker. He spent time in Oaxaca, Mexico working in lithography and woodcuts. He thrived working in a variety of media, “it’s part of the curiosity, so many different things to do.”

Art Impacts Life: Art is a reflection from intuition and objective observations. “Painting is a learning process as much as a process of expression.”

Let’s Look Closely

Look: In his paintings, the viewer can stare at seemingly haphazard compositions for hours, and realize that with every viewing the images morph into something different, unexpected.

Notice: A white spot becomes a dog, the intense star of a rooster. For people who are acquainted with Santana, an articulate speaker and bright intellectual, it may be surprising to find so much emotion in his creations.

Discuss: What is the relationship of the girl to the artist? Is it a close family relationship? What do you think the animals in the picture mean to the artist and to the model?

Get a Fuller Picture

Santana's involvement in civil rights and community issues, including numerous national appointments, ultimately led him from the fields of Salinas to the halls of Washington DC and gave him a unique insight into the workings of social and political institutions, which would also have a great impact on his art.

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