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Whitestone Artist in new exhibit

■ Draws inspiration from homeland of Haiti

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COURTESY PHOTOS

Patricia Brintle's painting "Angels in the Garden."



Whitestone-based artist Patricia Brintle is making waves with her unique art inspired by her Haitian roots. A mix of cubism and impressionism, her art heavily features face-less silhouettes of Haitian women dressed in headdresses and it tells a larger story about her homeland and culture. She, alongside other artists, have their artwork featured in Chelsea's Agora Gallery exhibit "Masters of the Imagination: The Latin American Fine Art Exhibition" until Oct. 6.

Brintle moved to Queens in 1964, but her journey as a professional artist didn't come until much after that. While she always had a skill for painting, she did it as a hobby and not as a profession. In Haiti, she used to make hand-painted cards for friends and filled her home with her paintings. Her artistic career didn't start until 2002, when a friend came over to her Whitestone house and suggested she should do a showcase of her art. That showcase was called "Four Decades," showing off forty years of her work. It was a hit.

Brintle describes herself as a self-taught artist, not following any "rules" but studying artists and drawing inspiration from them and creating her own unique style.

"Every single time I think back, I cannot remember a time when I wasn't drawing," she said. "It's something that was always there with me and I can see the growth because my art is all over the place. I didn't have a teacher to tell me follow this, or do this. I just follow the feeling."

One of the most influential art styles, made famous by Spanish painter Pablo Picasso, can be seen in her work, but with a twist, of course.

"I like the cubic effect," she said. "I like the juxtaposition of colors and I don't usually plan it. It just happens. Being self-taught doesn't necessarily mean there is no teaching. I read a lot, go to the museums a lot and that really is the school of hard knocks, so to speak. I pay attention and go to the museum and see which direction the strokes are going, how thick is the paint, if another substance is mixed in with the paint and go home and experiment."

"My cubism is a play with colors," she continued. "If I draw a portrait, everybody who comes over and looks at the painting has to deal with that face, those eyes, that mouth, that nose. There is no other choice, the viewer cannot decide who that could be. I want people to pay more attention to the story behind the painting. That's why I make my figures faceless, it's a silhouette. The viewer now has to look beyond the face, they focus on the colors, the things they are carrying, how they're holding themselves, where are they located. The viewer has to pay attention instead of looking into eyes and saying 'Wow, nice eyes.'"

Brintle's favorite piece is one that she hangs in the living room of her home, entitled "Angels in the Garden." The painting features four angels wearing traditional white headdresses in a bed of flowers with one angel off to the side speaking to them, directing them.

"It's not too colorful," she said. "Although it's different in colors, there's no bright colors, it's almost monotone. It seems to draw people in and make them want to look at it, then I tell them the story, it represent the earthquake [in Haiti] and I like to believe they're all angels singing in heaven. The yellow on the side is to show the struggle still happening in Haiti."

In January 2010, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake hit the Caribbean island. Hundreds of thousands of Haitians died and millions were affected.

The island has yet to recover and many, including Brintle, are still dealing with the aftermath of the disaster.

"The earthquake has made an impact not only on myself but every Haitian," she said "There isn't a Haitian who didn't have a family member, a friend or even knows someone who perished, everyone was touched by this catastrophe. I lost family and friends, I'm not unique in that sense. An artist, when they paint, their art work is always affected by their mood and state of mind, this quiet definitely impacted my work."

Brintle's artwork saw a shift in tone due to the disaster.

Her usually positive, bright work began to reflect her mournful mood, but she saw a way to turn something so depressing into something positive.

"People who viewed my recent work, they said 'hmm it's become a little dark.' It gave me a bit of a gauge of where I was going and if I should really pursue going there. I don't want dark, I want positive. I want people to see my work to feel happy even if it talks about a dark topic. It's sad and tragic but there is hope, you have to show hope in tragedy. Artists are like journalists, we want events to be depicted accurately. We all want that but I specifically wanted to concentrate on the hope that resulted from that tragedy."

She is now prepared to show off her best work at Agora, where she is proud to have her artwork showcased.

"For this exhibition, I wanted to do something special to represent the Latin American experience," she said.

"They told me that my work really expressed that and it's why I was fortunate enough to take part in the exhibition. If you go, a lot of my works are in the lobby on street level, which is so exciting. I still can't believe it, I'm pinching myself. My work is so bright when you look at it, you immediately know it's my work. I know if I passed by, I would be attracted by it"