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The Zúñiga sculpture "Coloquio" inside the Winfield Gallery in Carmel. (Photo by Patrick Tregenza)

Sculpture shelters out of place Winfield Gallery welcomes formidable art piece to Carmel

By Lisa Crawford Watson | March 20, 2021

CARMEL — Chris Winfield has an eye for art. Surveying the array of fine artistry he curates for his eponymous Carmel art gallery, one can see he chooses carefully, creating a complement of styles and expression.

"The art I represent is based on my taste, which is rather eclectic," Winfield said. "I strive for a certain level of quality and, as I've been able to bring in more important work, that level goes up. The gallery presents work by people I've handled since the early days, who are loyal and constantly developing."

The "early days" return Winfield, an accomplished painter, to 1990, when he opened Viewpoint Gallery at The Crossroads Shopping Center. Ten years later, he relocated the gallery to Carmel and renamed it Winfield Gallery.

Whether it was foresight or opportunity, he chose a space on Dolores Street, where Dene Denny and Hazel Watrous, who founded the Carmel Music Society (1927) and the Carmel Bach Festival (1935), opened Carmel's first art gallery.

Over the years, Winfield has brought many prominent and interesting artists to Carmel including, most recently, dramatic drawings and bronze sculptures by renowned Mexican artist Francisco Zúñiga (1912-1998).



The Zúñiga sculpture "Coloquio" being transported inside the Winfield Gallery in Carmel. (Photo courtesy of Winfield Gallery)

"A gallery director, COVID-shuttered in Los Angeles, was lamenting that these incredible works could not be seen," said Winfield. "So, I said I'd be more than happy to represent them in Carmel."

The imposing sculptures, a portrayal of the soft and generous female form, are a combination of fabrication and cast bronze, finished in a rich, dark-brown patina.

Although one already has sold, the most formidable and compelling sculpture, "Coloquio," is a significant presence rising on Winfield's stage at the back of his gallery. The piece represents an intimate and meaningful conversation between two women, the leaning in and the taking in of the relationship and the message, one appearing earnest and the other, possessed of wisdom.

"I've always appreciated Zúñiga's work," said Winfield. "I can sense the weight of the relationship, the feeling of dignity but also angst portrayed in these figures, who are bound to the earth, to their culture, to each other."

Francisco Zúñiga was born in Costa Rica but is claimed as a Mexican artist, as it was in Mexico that he really established his reputation. After moving to Mexico in 1936, he joined the faculty of "La Esmerelda," the prestigious Mexican School of Painting and Sculpture of the National Institute of Fine Arts, where he taught until 1970. Zúñiga's first exposure in the United States was his participation in "Thirteen Mexican Artists" at the Chicago Art Club in 1941. Scholars suggest his work reveals the influences of both German expressionism, which emphasizes the artist's emotions, and the work of French sculptor Auguste Rodin. Similarly, both his own story and his artwork are dramatic and imposing.

Winfield considers Zúñiga a world-class sculptor, drawing parallels to English sculptor, the late Henry Moore. His work also brings to mind the work of Francisco Botero. Although their styles diverge, each is known for the large, exaggerated volume of his figures.

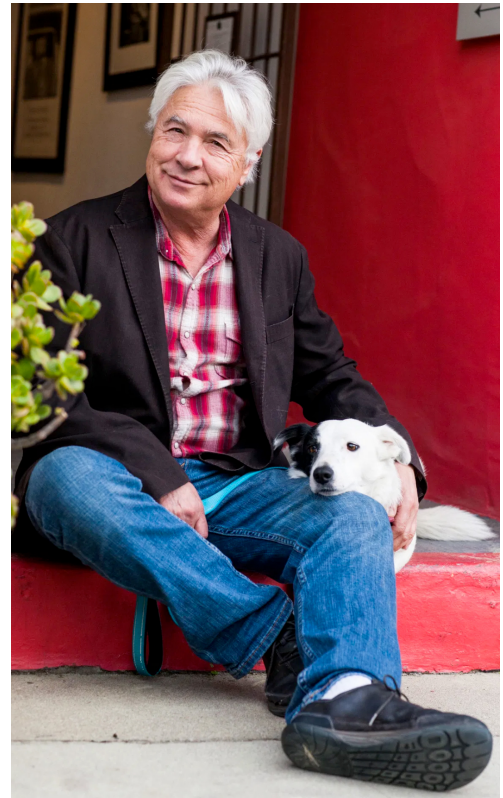
"I think Zúñiga is a master," Winfield said. "He understands the figure, and how to portray the emotional weight these people carry with them. To have his work here enables me to reach that upper level of amazing art. It's very exciting work, and that I get to live with it is incredible."

When the sculptures first came to Carmel, Winfield opened their crates out in the street. Having brought out two dollies, he attached them, using L brackets, directly to the crate, so he and his staff could roll them right through his doorway, across the gallery, up a ramp, and onto his gallery stage, where "Coloquio" is holding court.

"I find Zúñiga's work to be a fitting complement to the other art I represent in the gallery," said Winfield. "Everything here has some kind of classical quality to it. In curating art, I look for patina and surface, plus technique and the level of care the artist has put into the work, which is what really makes a difference."

Equally important, he says, is whether the art contains or presents ideas about who we are as a culture, an era, a wider community, translated into art. "Too many people show pieces that don't convey ideas; nothing is a reflection of society or who we are. It's well-crafted," he said, "but not art. The depth and breadth of ideas a piece contains speak to us about who we are."

Zúñiga's timeless work, if we're willing to look and listen, continues to tell us who we are and what we represent.



Chris Winfield, owner of Winfield Gallery in Carmel
(Photo by Michelle Magdalena Maddox).

Winfield Gallery is located at Dolores between Ocean and 7th avenues in Carmel. (831) 624-3369

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