

# Martin's colorful art leaves lasting impressions

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Eugene Martin's art is in the collections of Kofi Annan, United Nations secretary-general and the Munich Museum of Modern Art. His work has been displayed in New York City, Hawaii, Paris, Budapest, New Zealand and beyond.

But Kendall Banks of Lafayette only had to travel as far as Jefferson Street to witness the impact Martin's colorful art had on others.

"I helped him set up his first show at Jefferson Street Market," said Banks, who was Martin's agent for the past nine months. "I saw how people of all ages and educational back-



Eugene Martin

grounds embraced his work.

"Kids were coming up to him telling him they had never seen abstract art like his. Older, more educated people did the same.

"That's what really caused me to embrace him. His work is awesome."

Friends and fans are remembering Martin, who died Jan. 1 after a month's stay in the hospital. His funeral was held Wednesday at Martin and Castille Funeral Home, followed by a celebration of his life at a private home on St. Mary Boulevard.

A retrospective show of Martin's art begins Feb. 4 at Clementine Dining and Spirits, 113 E. Main St., in New Iberia. Exhibits at the Louisiana State Museum and LSU are also in the works.

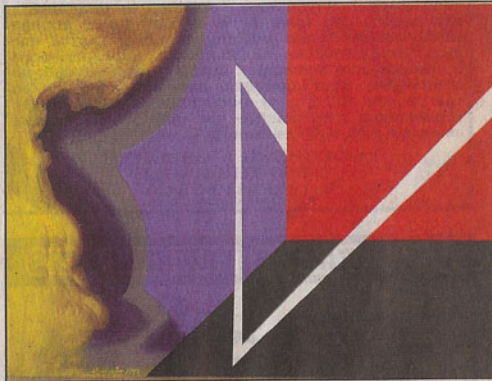
Twelve of the favorite pieces of Martin and his wife, Suzanne Fredericq, will be featured in a 2005 calendar.

A Washington, D.C., native born in 1938, Martin spent his



Art by Eugene Martin

early life as a runaway from foster homes after his mother died when he was 5. He spent time in a reform school before working on a farm, where he drew animals, built sheds and worked on



farm machinery.

In a 1985 interview with Dean Howard King of the University of North Carolina, Martin said time in reform school, where most of the kids were tough

teens twice his age, taught him to be mentally rugged and stubborn to rejection.

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"That made me have an individual way of looking at things, my own way of thinking," said Martin. "I learned not to be controlled.

"An artist has to learn that, because other people are going to want to control him, and influence his work."

After a stint in the Navy, Martin returned to D.C., where he worked nights as a janitor so that he could attend the Corcoran School of Art.

After finishing school, Martin dedicated his life to drawing and painting. Although he received limited media exposure through the years, Martin's abstract art has been featured in galleries, museums and universities around the world.

One European art journal praised Martin's "resolute, honest, but never screaming color." Another said "Martin

shows us his happiness in color, as a real American with a generous smile."

A Lafayette resident since 1996, Martin had local exhibits at the Zigler Museum in Jennings, Opelousas Museum of Art and Galerie Lafayette. In 2002, Martin suffered a stroke that left part of his face paralyzed.

But family friend Maria Ponce de Leon said the stroke failed to stop his creativity.

"He had several thousand works in his home and they were just incredible," said Ponce de Leon. "His art is very different, like an explosion of color.

"It's like looking in a kaleidoscope and seeing all that color. That's what really attracted me to his art."

Banks agreed, saying Martin's art was a kaleidoscope for the mind.

"His abstract art did not constrict a person's thoughts, like some others do," said Banks. "It released the mind beyond what you were seeing. It crossed all boundaries of thought."