

Arts&Entertainment

'Seek just a little truth'

Martin art collection to open at AMoA on April 27

By Robin Miller

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This is one of their favorites, the painting with a hint of a face, the suggestion of a person.

And a bold statement of personality. It could be that of the viewer's or the artist's. It's all in the way you look at it.

Which is the best part of Eugene Martin's work; it's a personal experience.

Martin was best at describing his work.

"If you seek just a little truth, as most, you should not ignore abstract forms, the basis from which all short-lived experiences we call reality springs," he said.

These words were spoken in an interview before his death on Jan. 1, 2005 in Lafayette. They're also used as his main statement on the Web site www.artnet.com.

"He had a stroke in 2001," Richard Gwarty says, still looking at the piece he likes best.

Anne Reid stands beside Gwarty, nodding in agreement.

This particular piece will be one among 113 in an exhibition of Martin's work at the Alexandria Museum of Art, beginning April 27.

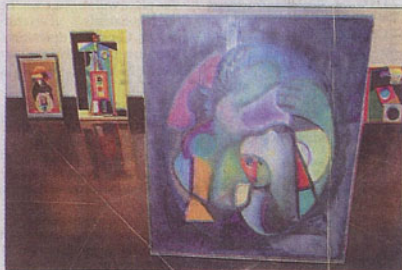
"We were originally supposed to open this Friday with a reception," Gwarty says. "But we had to push the opening date back."

Gwarty is the museum's director, Reid its curator. They've been developing this show for the past year, first contacting Martin's widow, Suzanne Fredrique, then visiting her home.

"And when we found this particular piece, it was sort of buried under others in a back room of her house," Gwarty says. "Anne and I both fell in love with this one, and we found out later that this is the first picture Eugene had given to his wife."

They speak of the favorite picture again, the one with the hint of a face — the one filled with personality.

Now it's clear that the personality presented here is that of Martin's wife. Then again, viewers won't exactly know this when walking slowly by each painting on the museum's second floor, eyes



Works by Eugene J. Martin are shown at the Alexandria Museum of Art.



Photos by Douglas Collier/The Town Talk

These Eugene J. Martin works sit ready to be hung at the Alexandria Museum of Art Tuesday. The show is set to open April 27.

KNOW TO GO

► **What:** An exhibition of the works of Eugene Martin

► **When:** April 27-June 30. Hours are 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Tuesday through Friday, and 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday. There will be an opening reception 5-7 p.m. April 27.

► **Where:** Alexandria Museum of Art

► **Admission:** \$4 for adults, \$3 for senior citizens, members of the military and students ages 14-21; and \$2 for children ages 4-13. Children under age 4 are admitted free.

► **For information:** (318) 443-6458.

soaking in Martin's vibrant colors.

The piece will hang on the wall near the window overlooking the Red River. "We chose 113 pieces for this show, and after taking them from Suzanne's

house, it looked as if we didn't take any paintings at all," Gwarty continues. "There are that many. Suzanne lives in a 10-room house in Lafayette, and Eugene's paintings cover the walls of all of them. And they're stacked in some of them."

Gwarty shows an example of what he means by "stacked." Fredrique compiled a binder of articles and photographs relating to her husband's work. One photo shows the artist in his studio, paintings standing upright and leaning on one another in rows against the wall.

"It was an orderly system, really. A tidy one, too.

But in the midst of this system, Gwarty and Reid found the painting that was probably the most heartfelt between Martin and his wife.

"So, it's no wonder we were drawn to it," Reid says.

"There's really so much to see in this exhibit," Gwarty adds. "We've tried to do a retrospect of his life's work by choosing works representing the different decades and phases of his work. So, when you walk through the exhibit, you can see his progression."

And that progression began in the 1960s. Martin was born in Washington, D.C. He lived in foster homes when growing up, meaning he had no money for art supplies or money.

"He said he was poor, so he drew on found paper, whatever he could find," Reid says.

Martin was largely self-taught, but attended the Corcoran School of Art and Design in Washington from 1960 to 1963. He became a full-time artist after that, living briefly in Chapel Hill, N.C., then back to Washington and fi-

Truth

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nally Lafayette, where wife Suzanne is a biology professor at the University of Louisiana, Lafayette.

Now, the obvious categorization of Martin's work would be abstract. Still, this single category wouldn't be fair to the artist, for his paintings have much to say.

Remember those bits of reality to which he referred in the earlier quote? That's what seems to be happening in this line-up on the museum's second floor. These are stories, flashes of thought and feelings on people and the world in which they live.

"The colors are so brilliant," Gwartney says. "Children are going to love this."

Gwartney's right. Children are drawn to bright colors. They're also uninhibited about looking into the heart of artwork. Abstracts surely will surely challenge their imaginations.

Martin's work has already reached out and touched the heart of Gwartney's and Reid's imaginations, for they could sense which piece was one of Martin's favorites.

Because it became their favor-



Douglas Collier/The Town Talk

Alexandria Museum of Art Museum Director Richard Gwartney discusses the work of Eugene J. Martin before hanging pieces for a