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New Mexico Eccentrics

ating the Pueblo Revolt of 1680
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PUEBLO CULTURAL CENTER

Patricia Marin Feather Art



Birds have always held a strong, symbolic presence in Patricia Marin's life. Born and raised in San Jose, Costa Rica, she would watch the exotic, tropical flocks of macaws, parrots, and toucans and wish that she, too, could fly. As both a child and later as a single mother who cleaned hotels and factories, Marin fantasized about what it would feel like to be unbound, to go anywhere she desired, to fully experience the wind.

A series of challenging turns landed Marin and her five children in the United States, ultimately bringing her to Santa Fe after the children had become independent adults. But it was a chance occurrence that recharged those vivid feelings about birds, as well as her memories of Arte Plumaria, a native feather painting tradition.

"Arte Plumaria was dying out in the 17th century," Marin said. "It involved the specialists who painted directly on the feathers with acrylics and oils."

When Marin was living in Costa Rica, she had a curious neighbor, a teacher during the weekdays, who would walk in front of her house in the evenings. One day she noticed the man had some blotches of paint on his hands and fingers, and she asked if he was painting his house or a fence. He said that he was painting bird feathers, and he invited Marin to watch him. She quickly came to love seeing him smear and coat images directly onto the quills.

About two years ago, her memories of the friend, and the peculiar sense of enlightenment she had while watching him practice the old art style, reemerged, literally falling at her feet.

Marin had only recently moved to Santa Fe, and she and a friend were walking to their cars after dinner when a large raven soared over the tops of their heads. As the friend said, "I wish I had one of those feathers," one sizable feather descended from the dashing raven. Marin picked it up and was overcome.

"It felt as if I needed to paint the feather for my friend," Marin said. "I took it home and I painted it. I brought it back to her, with a nice frame. She loved it. That's the moment the idea came to start painting feathers. It was *déjà vu*."

Marin works mostly from wild turkey feathers. She often blends elements of Spanish, Native American, and Southwestern cultures, painting everything from a headdress, a frog in a pond, a Zia Pueblo sunset, a long-tailed macaw, or a tourist plaza onto the feather to create a unique collectible.

Before painting, Marin ensures that the feathers are in pristine form and clean. Once a feather passes inspection, she applies the primary layer of acrylic. A single layer takes about two hours to dry, and once that happens, she will add a second layer. Working with such an untraditional resource as a feather draws out a unique set of emotions from the artist and others.

"Feathers touch people in a certain way," Marin said. "People see the richness in sharing stories. I've had couples in (my studio) dancing on the floor."

Marin's pieces often inspire catharsis and gratitude, reminding onlookers of our common network amid the environment, or Mother Earth.

"I like to think of the feather as like a woman, soft, delicate, but at the same time, a strong thing. ... And I want all women thinking that they could be as strong like a feather is."

"For me, there are no rules in art," Marin said. "I'm self-taught and proof that ... anyone could do something with their hands. Feathers are an art based in hope, love, compassion and miracles."