

“A LIFE LIVED WITH PASSION FOR ART AND EDUCATION IS FULL OF MEANING AND PURPOSE.”

- *María Schmitz Valles.*

After more than thirty years of presenting her paintings and working in higher education, María Schmitz Valles has many interesting experiences to recall. — "They have all brought exciting moments that still motivate me to continue working,"— she said in a TV interview when her paintings were presented in Barcelona (Spain) and then, at Ateneo in San Juan, Puerto Rico. She is a professor of Spanish Literature, an artist, and a writer.

As a writer, she has published three books of poetry in Spanish. BAUL INTERIOR (INTERIOR BAGGAGE) was published in 2005; CAMINOS EN EL TIEMPO (PATHS THROUGH TIME) in 2007; and ME HABLO EL SILENCIO (Silence talked to me) in 2012. She just finished writing a novel, EL CORAJE DEL VIENTO (THE FURY OF THE WIND).

2008 was an important year for María. Her poems Risas (Laughs) and Me Habló el Silencio (Silence Talked to Me) were included in an anthology of Spanish poets. The passion for poetry began while she was pursuing her postgraduate degree in Spanish literature. “The pressure was enormous, with the long readings and subsequent analysis. So, creating fantasy worlds throughout my poetry and paintings was relaxing,” she said on a radio program.

María worked as a Professor of Spanish for thirty years and also volunteered at the Ponce Museum of Art. When Dr. Carmen Fischler, the executive director of the museum at the time, asked her to create and present a series of lectures for schools and colleges, María agreed. The goal was to reorient the museum’s mission toward education.

As a member of the Board of Trustees of Catholic University of PR, María belonged to the US National Association of Governing Boards of Universities. In Seattle, Washington, she presented an essay titled “The Importance of Diversity in Modern Higher Education”. Then, as a trustee, she used her leadership skills to establish a Board of Regents at the Guayama campus. As President of the Board, she worked alongside her husband, James, to establish a scholarship endowment. She also organized cultural and fundraising events that connected the university with other institutions and local communities. At the same time, she was the Vice President of the Board of Directors at the School for Students with Disabilities in Guayama, PR. In this role, she facilitated new and efficient programs that promoted the education of disabled children and adults in southern Puerto Rico. The exhibition “Rompiendo Barreras Através del Arte” (Breaking Barriers Through Art), at the Interamerican University, presented the art created by these students under her guidance. It was a memorable event.

She grew up in the countryside, where her father was a hardworking farmer who employed over a hundred laborers from 1950 until 1975. He used to work alongside them. Because of this, María grew up surrounded by a culture of work, even though she was never allowed to set foot

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on the farm because at that time “those were things appropriate only for men”. Like her father, María loves to work hard. As a retiree, she spends most of her time painting and writing, encouraged by her husband, James. He’s a chemical engineer who worked for Phillips Petroleum (later Conoco Phillips). Throughout their 38 years of marriage, he’s been highly supportive of all her educational and civic projects, as well as the art presentations.

As an artist, she captures the vibrant colors of the Caribbean, the United States, and Spain, bringing them to life on her canvases. Since 1988, her large-format paintings have been exhibited in galleries and museums, receiving acclaim in full-page newspaper articles. In 2005, her painting *Sinfonía Caribeña* (Caribbean Symphony) was exhibited in Paris at L’Art d’ICI et D’Ailleurs, an event sponsored by the French cultural organization Sarabanda. These exhibitions earned her positive reviews and an award from the International Association of Art Critics (AICA)

Maria currently lives in the USA. As a retiree, she dedicates some of her time to learning about the history of small southern towns and studying how to write poetry in English. Another book of poetry on the horizon? Who knows? With good humor, James humors that he can’t lend her a helping hand with this project. “How could I support her efforts to learn to write poems in English? As an engineer, I wouldn’t be able to grasp the sophisticated language of poetry...”

Recognitions:

In 1993:

She received a Merit Award for her work with disabled children.

In 1994:

She was recognized by the governor of Puerto Rico, Luis Ferré, for her work at the Ponce Museum of Art.

In 1994:

Dedication of the Second Anniversary of the Fine Arts Center in Guayama, PR.

In 1995:

The city of Guayama PR, honored her distinguished career as an educator, writer and civic leader.

In 1997:

Dedication of the Fifth Anniversary of the Fine Arts Center in Guayama, PR.

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In 1999:

She was recognized as one of the most outstanding Guayama residents in the HISTORY of GUAYAMA at the TURN of the CENTURY, a book written by history professor Francisco Vázquez.

In 2000:

Carnegie Hall, in San Juan, PR, exhibited twenty-six of her large-format paintings.

In 2002:

UNESCO honored her as one of the thirty-five most outstanding women during the thirty-fifth anniversary celebration of the UNESCO Association in Puerto Rico.

In 2005,

She received the Award of Excellence from the International Association of Art Critics (AICA) for her painting Sinfonía Caribeña (Caribbean Symphony), which was exhibited in Paris.