

Classic Religious Painting Has Colorful History

UNDER
THE SUN



Eddy Kühl

The oil painting of the Sacred Family, hung in the Ateneo Chapel of the Episcopal Palace of Matagalpa, is believed to be the work of the master painter Bartolomeus Murillo, who lived in Spain during the late

17th Century.

The painting shows the Virgin, the Child, Saint Joseph, visited by St. Ignatius de Loyola, and St. Louis de Gonzaga.

It was brought to Matagalpa from Spain by Jesuit priests in 1874 and hung on the altar wall of the chapel in Matagalpa.

Originally, in the 1870s, there were two classic oil paintings on display in the chapel, but the other one was taken by the indigenous and used to wrap valuables during their attack on the city in 1881, which historians call "La Guerra de los Indios de 1881." That painting was never recovered.

The painting of the Sacred Family was also being wrapped up in the same way, but was left behind by the indigenous when they heard the advance of the reinforcement cavalry troops coming from Managua. The Sacred Family painting was ultimately recovered, but suffered some damage, including the area of the signature, now illegible.

The painting, however, is believed to have been painted by the classical master Murillo



Eddy Kühl | Nica Times

The Sacred Family: On display at the Ateneo Chapel in Matagalpa.

because of its seniority, and delicacy (you can analyze the detailed form of the hands). Hands are considered very difficult to paint, and these ones are masterfully done.

The faces, expressions, colors and size are all signs of a classical work of art from that era.

How has such a valuable painting been preserved in Matagalpa for so many years?

After the indigenous war, Demetria Molina Zeledon, wife of the former provincial Governor, Mathias Baldizon, feared the risk of another indigenous attack, so she left the

painting in the custody of the local Catholic Church, which later became appointed the Cathedral of Matagalpa in 1924.

Baldizon happened to be the treasurer of the construction of the huge Catholic temple being built by the Jesuits with the help of area residents, during the years 1870s-1880s.

In 1907, a German immigrant, Otto Kuehl, who was married to the Governor's daughter, made the solid wood frame in which the picture now sits to be appreciated by all.

The Nicaraguan Archdiocese, then located in León, made several requests that the painting be moved there in the late 1800s, but the petition was rejected. It was determined that the painting did not belong to the Catholic Church, but rather to its custodian, the heirs of Demetria Molina Baldizon, who now happen to number more than 200 people.

The current custodian of the painting is the oldest surviving member of the family.

The painting is oil on canvas, measures 8x6 feet, is protected by a solid wood frame, and is starting to show signs of deterioration.

This precious painting can be visited and photographed with care, in the Ateneo Chapel, located in the Episcopal Palace, in the city of Matagalpa.

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Granada's New Garden Café Keeps it Simple with Sandwiches

OUT
ON THE
TOWN



Sam Jacoby

The gardens of Granada are well-kept secrets. Guarded by the tall adobe walls of the city's colonial residences, they peek through barred gates, taunting overheated visitors with promises of shady sanctuary.

The Garden Café, one of the newest entries into Granada's booming city center, offers welcome access to that green interior – and a perfect glass of lemonade to go with it.

California native Damien Hopkins, 29, and Managua-born Xiomara Díaz, 23, opened the doors to their street-corner paradise a month ago. They serve a variety of fresh sandwiches and salads, alongside a rotating soup of the day and fresh juices and smoothies. Their vision was not complex, but has filled a niche in this colonial city.

"It's just a sandwich shop," Hopkins says. "It's a café, a French word, it means cafeteria. A simple place like this, we do coffee and sandwiches. We even use a deli order form."

Instead of a conventional menu, there's a paper card on which to check off your order. There are a dozen options – turkey-pesto on ciabatta, pastrami with swiss – and the more adventurous can cobble together their own invention from a list of ingredients on the back. It's hard to go wrong.

The "Garden Veggie" is spiced with a sharp mustard dressing and has the satisfying snap of fresh lettuce and cucumber.

The "Mediterranean," a pita smothered in yogurt sauce, rich feta cheese and olives, has a creamy softness that is offset by the acidic bite of the accompanying side salad of cab-



Tim Rogers | Nica Times

Just a Sandwich Shop: Damien Hopkins and Xiomara Díaz have found success in keeping it simple at Granada's Garden Café.

bage and carrot.

Amanda Felix, an English native traveling through town, happily digs into her Garden Salad. "It's very nice fresh food," she says, polishing off the medley of greens, roasted walnuts and apples.

The simple though diverse menu is the

product of Hopkins own wide-ranging experience.

"I just like to cook," he says. "I worked in a few restaurants in California – Italian and Mexican places. I picked up different things everywhere."

Inspired by a friend's sandwich shop back

in the United States, after the couple finished up university last year in the nearby college town of San Marcos, they were looking for a challenge.

"We were thinking, well, maybe a sandwich shop, that won't be too hard, that might be worth it," Hopkins says. "We didn't know what we were getting ourselves into, otherwise we wouldn't have done it," he laughs.

"People told us it would be seven days a week, 24 hours a day. I thought, 'whatever, we can do it,'" he says, adding, "It's been more like eight days a week, 25 hours a day, but it has been fun."

At this point the couple is used to the hard work. They began the long process of opening up their new business six months ago, when they found the property and began extensive renovations.

"The place was a real fixer-upper," Hopkins said. "A wreck. No lights, no electricity, no garden. These doors, they'd been covered up in lead paint since the 1920s or something."

Now the century-old colonial mansion gleams. The wood shines with a rich natural luster. And though Hopkins claims that they "just bought a ton of plants," it is clear that a serious green thumb has been at work in the eponymous garden.

Lushly planted with succulents and young palms, a carefully combed gravel path winds through the flowering ground cover and a fountain babbles in the corner. A hammock sways in the breeze.

The dusty heat of the streets is a distant memory.

The Garden Café is a block towards the lake from the Central Park, east of the Enitel building. It is open Tuesday through Sunday, from 11 a.m. - 9 p.m. ■