



Yesterday Today Tomorrow







ALVAR: Yesterday Today Tomorrow





Written by Alison R. Tallman





With a career spanning more than half a century long, museums and galleries from Spain to Japan to America, continue to honor the passionate and insightful works of Alvar Suñol. From his early artistic success at age 18, Alvar has accumulated an impressive résumé consisting of prestigious awards, solo exhibitions, numerous books regarding his life and works, an award-winning documentary which has made it's way to public television, and permanent installations.

With increased interest in his original paintings and drawings, he has been recognized with four museum exhibitions since 2005. His audience continues to value the timeless messages, using an array of symbolism, conveyed through his pieces. His devotion has expanded his use of media including: oil paintings, lithographs, graphite drawings, watercolor, and sculpture. With any medium Alvar employs, his tireless energy and aesthetic sensitivity gives insight to a well-rounded artist.

Named a contemporary Renaissance painter, Alvar combines the freedom and innovation of the cubist period with the skillfulness of the Renaissance to achieve his distinctive style. He attributes his purpose to the masters, the great European painters, respecting and utilizing their elaborate techniques. A rebirth of historic values and elements are Alvar's inheritance. "The appreciation of those values is what I want to transmit pictorially in my painting," comments Alvar. His most recent works are dedicated to achievements in art history as he continues to paint in their wake.

“Good art speaks to the world but reflects the artist’s origins.

In his own work, Alvar has endeavored to address the **passions he believes are universal** in the human community at the same time that he **expresses the sensibility of his own culture, that of Catalonia.”** -Dr. Betty Jean Craige

MODERN MASTER





IN THIS PICTURE: Catalonia honors Alvar with an Exhibition: "Retrospective Alvar: Emprems En El Temps" at The Sales Gòtiques De L'Abadia De Sant Miguel Del Fai (an old Abbey restored by the government of Catalonia as an exhibition center to honor Catalonian arts and culture). Here Alvar is pictured with Jordi Pujol, Catalonia's president.

A traditionally skilled painter, Alvar believes an artist's craft is important to produce expression properly. This craft he calls *el oficio*, is not just knowing how to put a brush to the canvas but also how to dictate composition, understand the genre and relay a meaning. Alvar has created in the whole of his art...a Mediterranean village of his imagination. It is a nostalgic fantasy where villagers interact with one another in harmony. He has manifested a universe, illustrating floating figures playing instruments, enjoying art and celebrating the harvest, to reflect a prosperous life. These figures live by the ideals of peace, liberty and tolerance, while depicting a simpler time revolving around family. "I want collectors to perceive the emotions that I try to transmit in my work, feelings of love for humanity, nature and honesty in the work," says Alvar.

That is the inspiration for his art. The contribution of his works has given him recognition as one of Spain's most collected, great artists of our time. "Alvar experiences - and represents throughout his work- between the built environment and the human bodies that occupy it, between the realm of daily life and the realm of the spirit, between rationality and emotion," says **Dr. Betty Jean Craige, a Professor at the University of Georgia and Director of the Wilson Center for Humanities and Arts**. His wisdom and beliefs from each message carry over into a new generation. **Montserrat Puertas, Museum Curator for the Department of Culture of Cataluña in Spain**, believes that Alvar's broad appeal arises from his unique ability to integrate the culture of Mediterranean past with the culture of Mediterranean present. Now in his seventies, Alvar still continues to portray the boundless beauty in our world of everyday life.



While working and living in his earlier years in Paris, the great artistic center of the world, Alvar produced his first lithograph in 1963. His lithographs use up to fifteen colors, pressed individually on to the paper by zinc plates fifteen separate times. He may add drops of water or lace for texture or etch lines by hand, spending days experimenting on the look of one color. One finished lithograph may take up to three weeks to create. Upon completion of the lithograph, Alvar takes the edition to another workshop to be embossed. Only then will he sign it.

From 1975 through the nineties, he dedicated most of his time to lithography rather than painting. Over the span of forty years, he has created over 100 original lithographs. When Alvar reached seventy years old, he redirected his attention again to painting and drawing. Now he can work more liberally, free of project deadlines as with the lithography. Equal time and energy can be spent improving the physical application of the paint and his intellectual insights.



IN THIS PICTURE: From 2006 to 2008, Alvar was commissioned to create several pieces of art, honoring the late cellist Pablo Casals, also from Catalonia, Spain. Among this was a lithograph, pictured above. Pablo Casals was a musician for whom Alvar has expressed great admiration.

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he phrase *el oficio* in Spanish defines the concepts of craft, skill, talent and the mastery of technique. It is that very definition that Alvar Suñol applies his life's work, winding his passion into his imagery. According to Alvar, though *el oficio* does not make an artist, an individual cannot be an artist without it. "I want a rebirth of *oficio*, of craft, a rebirth of skill and know-how, a rebirth of the traditional artistic values that the great artists have bequeathed to us," says Alvar. Time and attention to detail, is the foundation in his complex oil paintings while forming a perspective of a simpler life filled with poetry, love and music. Layer upon layer, he applies colors attentively and then distresses the laden strokes with a pallet knife once dry to his paintings. He performs the same ritual again and again until his oil paintings produce "the illusion of the infinite depths of human experience. It presents the illusion of the human spirit inhabiting the material reality of the world we perceive," interprets **Alan Stecker, a retired professor from the University of Georgia and the co-director of the documentary "Alvar: His Vision and His Art"**.

Among these scenes are suspended figures, human beings, whose gender is mostly insignificant, with similar features and dark eyes, representing humanity. Women are defined in some pieces, representing the beginning of life and generations. More abstract, but equally as important, are the figures hands, grasping a wine glass, a musical instrument, a dove or each other.

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ABOUT THIS IMAGE: Alvar was honored with two separate museum exhibitions in 1982 and 1983 at the Utah Museum of Art in Salt Lake City and at the Wichita Art Museum in Kansas.



The hands are holding together the composition by interacting with his constant symbols. These symbols represent the culture of a town, an appreciation for the arts, the nurturing of a family, the beginning of life or the passing of time. He recognizes we live in a globalized society and to dramatize this has added the familiar Coca-Cola logo, to some of his current works. The interior decoration in the rooms signifies a Mediterranean culture: a checkered floor, a tablecloth, the balustrades and the architecture. A half-opened drawer lingers in the background suggesting the unknown. **Dr. Leslie Hammond Chief Curator at the Appleton Museum of Art,** speaks about Alvar's usage of Iconography in his paintings: "[Alvar] uses so many different symbols and pictures to convey a message and that's so similar to what was going on in the Medieval period or the Renaissance or the Baroque." Iconography is the use of visual images, symbols or figures to represent complex ideas or themes, which are important to different cultures. An understanding of the images and symbols used in Alvar's artwork helps to reveal the numerous meanings.

“For me life has always been, is and always will be, freedom, love, and tolerance, and above all of that, painting.” -Alvar

ABOUT THIS IMAGE: Alvar was honored with an eight-week-long exhibition at the Appleton Museum of Art in Ocala, Florida in 2005. His discussion and enthusiasm for his work always draws a large crowd like the one pictured below.



A clock appears in several newer works, sometimes missing a hand or numbers, reminding us of how quickly life passes. Ironically, time is suspended by showing no movement from the characters. They are a complacent people, fulfilled in this life Alvar has made for them. An extensive amount of light, without a certain focal point, covers transparent broken planes of bold color and shapes. Geometric patterns and broken pieces of surface juxtapose larger ethereal figures with billowy clothed arms and flowing hair. The use of prominent color well blended and textured is an essential trait in Alvar's general aesthetic. "The result makes for a particular environment, warm perhaps, yet nevertheless somewhat unreal, which contributes to the stillness in which his figures are placed," writes **Eduard Carbonell, Professor of Art History at the University of Gerona in Spain.**





IN THIS PAINTING: The painting "Con Tiempo de Meditacion" (40" x 40", Oil on canvas) is a homage to nature. The naked woman is holding on to the leaves that grow from the Coke bottle, symbolizing the material world. The clock is there to remind us that we must utilize our time very well. The wine glass represents that we should use the juice of life and that we should not waste it. That is why the wine glass is upside down and the coke bottle, is right side-up, meaning that we live in the material world. We should take more time living in peace, which is denoted by a dove, in nature, and within our community, represented by the village in the background.





The style that most effected Alvar from the twentieth century was Cubism. He says, "Cubism gave us the choice, the freedom, to arrange the painting, to construct it, to geometricize it." The style inspired some artists to focus on construction and shy away from the less formal structure and fluid painting associated with impressionism. One of his earlier works from 1962, named "El Campesino," is a perfect example of Cubism. The painting depicts a large figure painted in grays and neutrals, fragmented and simplified into an abstract form. Alvar has a sixth sense for formulating a balanced composition. The viewer's eye follows a well-planned arrangement around the canvas. As objects carried by a table with no legs float, figures transcend reality with no bodies, the floor and walls appear as equal planes in the background, the viewer focuses on the main points of the imagery- the symbolism.

Art historian, Ernest Gombrich noted that cubism was "the most radical attempt to stamp out ambiguity and to enforce one reading of the picture."

Alvar has fused broken planes and geometric figures to create an aesthetically pleasing composition while instilling rhythm with the more evocative style of the Renaissance painters. Given the works complexity and cultured heritage, Alvar's paintings become part of his aesthetic ideal. Influences throughout his long career as a painter, are subtly embedded while coming together to dictate his sensitivities of other painters.

"Cubism gave us the choice, the freedom, to arrange the *painting*, to construct it, to geometricize it."

The names- Piero della Francesca, Vermeer and Balthus appear on the book bindings of Alvar's newer paintings and drawings, honoring his artistic ancestors. Mini paintings of these artist's own masterpieces further recognize them as artists Alvar admires. "Artists who have inspired him, not concretely, through technical aspects of painting...but rather through their sensitivities," writes **Eduard Carbonell**. This tribute has been the main theme of his most recent works. Alvar is highlighting men that were key reference points in art history, each one in his individual era, leaving a stylistic footprint behind for the future generations. The lesson being that fundamentals of painting need to survive, which he will continue to transmit pictorially in each stroke of the brush. It is at this present stage where years of learning who he is as an artist have made way to a fully composed style, an aesthetic sensitivity. Now, the influences he has collected over the years have not disappeared but are subtly embedded, "forming part of a living artistic baggage comprised by Alvar's life," notes **Eduard Carbonell**. He internalizes his fifty or so years of inspiration to complete his own individual style.





ABOUT THIS PAINTING: Alvar has created an interior of a typical Catalan home and still life with the absence of his normal genderless figures. The names- Piero della Francesca, Vermeer and Balthus appear on the book bindings of Alvar's newer paintings and drawings, honoring his artistic ancestors. Rich, earthly tones are carefully layered to create an interesting, painterly texture. The main inspiration of his paintings, Catalonia, is brought to life in his nostalgic imagination here. The checkered floor, the tablecloth, the architecture of the buildings in the background, and the bottle of wine on the table, all signifies Mediterranean culture. This painting was exhibited for his largest show at the Albany Museum of Art in 2007 called "Alvar Suñol: Contemporary Renaissance."



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lvar's acclaimed style has progressed off the two-dimensional plane of painting and lithography and into the form of sculpture. His sculpture ranges from vases to freestanding sculptures, in bronze, silver, porcelain and gold. His three-dimensional art encompasses freestanding works, high-relief murals, and two monuments approaching twenty feet high.

Similar thematic ideas, which Alvar has employed over the past years, appear in his sculpture as well as his paintings and lithography. The same faces and billowy hair and clothing stand waving, frozen in the bronze he has cast for them. The figures hold on to each other closely to make one intertwined piece of art. "The vases and the bowls gives us in relief that same spatial relationships between the figures and the ground that Alvar's paintings give us, with the same imagery: not only the Romanesque figures with the kerchiefs, the musical instruments, the poppies, the village rooftops, and the fruit, but also the checked floors and the patterned backgrounds," writes **Dr. Betty Jean Craige**.

One of the most esteemed privileges for Alvar has been the monumental bronze sculpture he created to honor Pablo Casals, famous Spanish cellist and composer, which now stands in Paris. In 2006, a Spanish real estate company named Restaura, that specializes in restoring historical buildings, asked Alvar to create the sculpture (pictured right) to permanently memorialize Casals as well as a lithograph and a painting to be displayed in their headquarters.



IN THIS PICTURE: Honoring the late Pablo Casals, Alvar was commissioned and created this large bronze sculpture, nearly ten feet tall and which weighed over 2,000 pounds. The grand piece depicts Pablo Casals with a body of a cello. The sculpture was unveiled in a newly renovated street in the outskirts of Paris, France in early 2008.



The city of Montgat Spain (Alvar's birthplace), commissioned Alvar to create a massive public installation in 2003. "Mediterranea" was constructed with four large concrete blocks and a bronze figure on top, making the sculpture 18 feet high. The figure is holding a child, signifying future generations, and holds several banners expressing the values Alvar holds dearest in the culture. It stands tall, welcoming the public to the city, next to the newly opened Plaza de Mallorquines. The piece shows his hope for humanity and our future. "It occurred to me to make four blocks representing the four capitals of Catalonia-Barcelona, Gerona, Lerida, and Tarragona—and to set one block upon another in a column. On top, I put a bronze female figure symbolic of Mediterranean culture. She holds several banners, which, waving in the Mediterranean breeze, carry the names of the values we need now in the social and political life of the Mediterranean. That is, peace, freedom and tolerance," explains Alvar of his work. These three words are written in the languages of the Mediterranean: Spanish, Catalan, French, Italian, Hebrew, Greek, Turkish, and Arabic. The child the woman holds, welcomes the next generation to come to Catalonia.



***"Catalonia is a land of immigrants, a country that welcomes with open arms everybody who has come here to work and live."* - Alvar**



IN THIS PICTURE: (Below)

The bowl entitled "Concierto En Las Horas Del Dia" (3.25" x 15.5", Bronze) is "divided" into 4 distinct sections taken from a Lithograph suite he created earlier:

The top left section is inspired by the "Morning Mood," from Edvard Grieg's musical composition. The inhabitants of a small town work under the light of a new day, arms raised embracing the first rays of sun.

The bottom left composition represents a piano concerto from Chopin's Nocturne No. 1: "Concert of the Hours of the Day."

The top right section takes place in midday. Nature is in full force and full activity- like the force unleashed in Ludwig van Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. The sun in the middle of the piece, organizes all the elements in the composition.

The bottom right section is inspired by Albinoni's musical piece: "Adagio." The three figures are framed with Renaissance architecture. One figure smells the Earth, trees and flowers emanating their most intense aromas at sunset.



IN THIS PICTURE: (Above)

Alvar has often paid tribute to motherhood and the origin of life in his art. In his figural sculpture, "Maternitat" (10.5"h x 12.5"w x 4"d, Bronze) the mother is sheltering her child from the realities of society with her right arm while offering hope and peace in her left hand with a laurel branch. He uses a 5,000-year-old technique with the Bronze called "Lost Wax."



IN THIS PAINTING: Inspired by "Concierto de Mediodia" one of the four pieces in the lithograph suite: "Concierto En Las Hora Del Dia," Alvar created this large painting called "Concert Del Migdia" (51" x 77", Oil on canvas)

Alvar's creative genius is masterfully shown in his multi-medium creations centering on the times of the day. His lithography suite, "Concierto En Las Hora Del Dia" (Concert of the Hours of the Day) depicts four periods of the day: morning, noon, afternoon, and evening. Following the creation of the lithograph suite, Alvar created a bronze bowl (pictured on previous page) that incorporates images from each of the lithographs that represent the four time periods of the day.



IN THIS PAINTING: In this piece, "Tiempos Persistentes" (20"x 24", Oil and Graphite on board), Alvar has combined the mediums of graphite and oil in honoring the artists Francesca, Vermeer and Pau Casals. He has incorporated three characters which has made his art famous, a bowl of fruit for enjoyment, checkered table cloth, a musical instrument in the cello, and architectural columns from the Renaissance period.



IN THIS PICTURE: Collectors, museums and cultural institutions alike continue to recognize Alvar as a distinguished and creative artist. Most recently the Museo De Dibujo Julio Gavin in Spain acclaimed Alvar for his medium of graphite pencil with an exhibition featuring 17 of his drawings.

This particular graphite drawing incorporates a familiar set of symbols used throughout Alvar's work. His figures float about the composition holding musical instruments and brushes, surrounded by books on the masters Alvar gives tribute to. A clock reminding us to appreciate our time hangs on wall opposite architecture characteristic of the Renaissance period. Beneath a bowl of fruit symbolizing enjoyment, is the typical Catalan checkered tablecloth. Contrast lies in the dark, solid eyes of the figures. Regardless of what media Alvar uses, he has the ability to create superb texture.



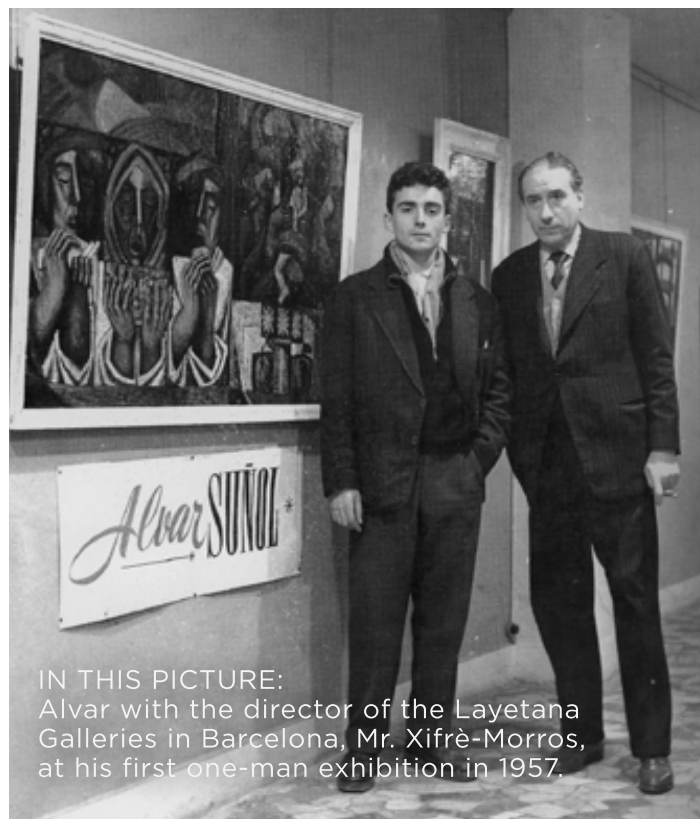


Alvar, one of Spain's most well-known living artists today is accompanied by an impressive résumé, which includes a variety of perfection driven masterpieces. Alvar has initiated years of solo exhibitions, in museums and galleries, devoted to the small fishing village in which he derives his work. His work has educated viewers, through his technical expertise and enthusiasm, about a heritage, a society and humanity. Reminding everyone that the ideal for oneself should be a spiritual necessity, a desire.

Alvar has chosen a style that helps portray these universal messages. "I never made a total abstract painting. I always had a reference point, something objective-like a fruit bowl or a pitcher. But those forms became abstract. Then I realized that for me abstraction was a direction without a future. For me, the absence of humanity in painting was a dead end. And so little by little, I returned to painting humanity," explains Alvar. It is this thematic idea which is elaborated in his extraordinary range of two and three-dimensional works. Alvar's *Plenitude*, a 44" x 57" painting developed and donated to the University of Georgia in Athens, is permanently

exhibited in their Continuing Education Center. Every year, the University of Georgia brings nearly 100,000 visitors, from around the world, to the Georgia Center where the painting has hung since February of 2007. This scholarly donation was part of a year-long celebra-

tion of the Georgia Center's 50th anniversary. **Dr. Betty Jean Craige, Director of the Center for Humanities and Arts at the University of Georgia,** has authored two books about the artist: "Alvar in Color and Poetry" (2005) and "Alvar: Thirty Years of Lithography" (2001). Dr. Craige has followed Alvar's career for a number of years, and in the process, has generat-



IN THIS PICTURE:
Alvar with the director of the Layetana Galleries in Barcelona, Mr. Xifre-Morros, at his first one-man exhibition in 1957.

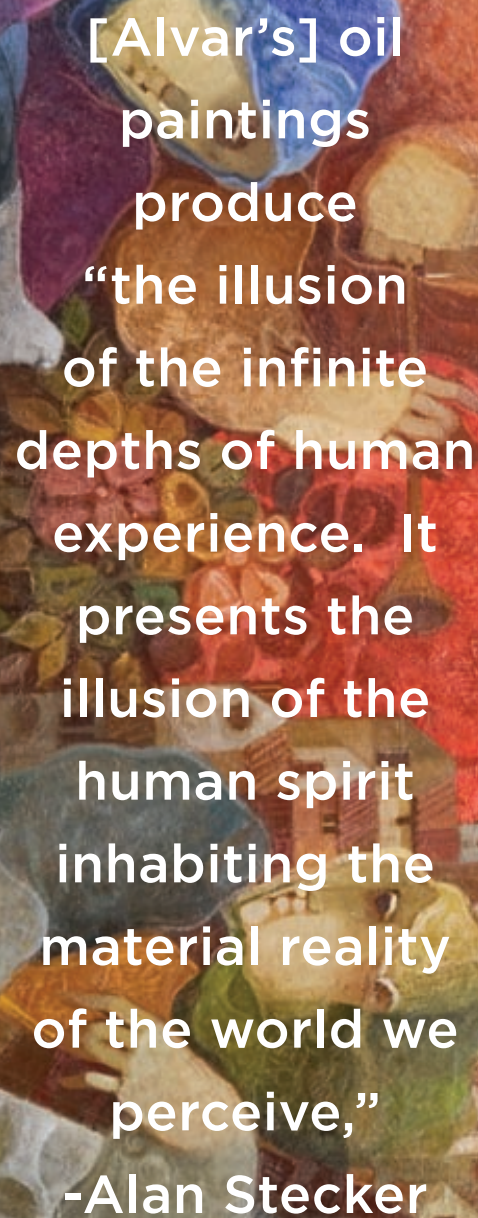
ed intrigue and enlightenment to the American art world. In 2006, **Dr. Craige and Alan Stecker, an artist and retired professor at the University of Georgia,** co-produced a documentary on him called "Alvar Suñol: His Vision and His Art." The 42-minute film was awarded first place in the short documentary category at the Indie



Gathering independent film festival. The film since has been broadcasted on public television. As well as recording his prolific career in print and video, Craige has also honored Alvar with the largest exhibition called Alvar Suñol: Contemporary Renaissance at the Albany Museum of Art.

In 2001, Alvar was commissioned to create a permanent public mural along a wall of The Four Seasons building in his hometown of Tiana, Spain.

Since his first solo exhibition in 1957, at the young age of 22, Alvar has instilled his collaborative and distinctive style across the art world. His paintings share the beliefs incorporated with a life and a culture, memorialized forever by his media. Alvar's classical roots, mixed with the degree in which he handles his craft, makes him a great contemporary classical painter. Alvar said, "Art gives me a motivation for living and an atmosphere in which to breathe." Study an Alvar painting; rich in texture, full of symbolism, bursting with color and steady composition, and you may find your own atmosphere in which to breathe. Most enthusiasts of Alvar claim his latest work has reached a pinnacle of success, mastering technical and conceptual expression. Today, it is no wonder why collectors, museum curators, academic professors, art critics, historians, and artists alike, view Alvar as a great contemporary artist whose works are in the permanent collections of eleven museums worldwide. More recently, the Museu de Badalona, in Spain, honored Alvar with a 50-year retrospective of his works and his largest exhibition ever took place at the Albany Museum of Art in Albany, Georgia in 2007. In the summer of 2009, Museo de Dibujo in Spain mounted an exhibition of his drawings. Due to its popularity, the museum extended the exhibition an additional two months. **Dr. Betty Jean Craige** notes that "with recent exhibits acknowledging the importance of his work to the history of Catalan art, Alvar assumes a well-earned place among the region's other 20th-century greats."



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IN THIS PICTURE: Museum Catalogs from recent exhibitions of Alvar's works.

In November 2009, the Museu de Badalona in Spain held a retrospective featuring Alvar's works from 1954-2008.

In 2009, the Museo de Dibujo Julio Gavin (Spain) hosted an exhibition of Alvar's drawings. Scheduled to run in May through July, the exhibit was extended through October due to its immense popularity.



CONSIDERING ALVAR

IN THIS PICTURE: In September of 2001, the Georgia Museum of Art held a six-week exhibition of Alvar's lithography.



Museum Collections & Retrospective Exhibitions:

Museu d'Arte Moderne - Barcelona, Spain

Museo del Grabado Contemporáneo - Marbella, Spain

Art Center of La Jolla - La Jolla, California

Finch College - New York

Glassboro State College - Glassboro, New Jersey

Jamestown College - Jamestown, North Dakota

Musée Hycinthe Rigaud - Perpignan, France

Utah Museum of Fine Art - Salt Lake City, Utah

Wichita Art Museum - Wichita, Kansas

Kumamoto Museum - Kumamoto, Japan

Fukuoka Museum - Fukuoka, Japan

Museo del Grabado - Zaragoza, Spain

Georgia Museum of Art - Athens, Georgia

The Appleton Museum - Ocala, Florida


The Albany Museum of Art - Albany, Georgia

Museu Badalona - Badalona, Spain

Museo De Dibujo Julio Gavin - Huesca, Spain







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-Dr. Betty Jean Craige

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