

NEW AMERICAN ARTISTS AS IN THE PAST, IMMIGRANTS ENRICH U.S. ARTS SCENE

San Jose Mercury News (California)

March 13, 1994 Sunday MORNING FINAL EDITION

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Section: EDITORIAL; Pg. 6P

Length: 266 words

Body

CALIFORNIA art and nature lovers know the majestic western landscapes painted by Albert Bierstadt, but many don't know he was an immigrant. Willem DeKooning pioneered abstract expressionism, and Marcel Duchamp did the same for modern art.

They too were immigrants.

On the Commentary Page to the right are the words of current immigrant artists who have a show at De Anza College in Cupertino. They have lots to say about leaving home and finding refuge and freedom, but also discrimination and identity crises, in America. They are mostly optimistic, which, when you think about it, is the word that best describes the immigrant in history.

Too often, Americans describe immigrants as a threat and a burden. They usually are proven wrong. For example, many post-colonial Americans feared German immigrants never could adapt to democracy and would turn America into a militaristic society, an idea that seems ridiculous now.

Subsequent waves of immigrants through the 1940s came to the United States to escape genocide, jihad and repression. Then opportunity beckoned to artists when the creative and financial center of the art world switched from a shattered Europe to New York.

Some of today's immigrant artists seek refuge from harsh regimes. Others simply seek their artistic fortunes. Past immigrant waves were largely European. This one is Asian, Latin American and African, but the idea that newcomers see with fresh eyes remains valid.

Among them may be the next Bierstadt. Or maybe not. It doesn't matter. They will contribute in positive ways to art and to America.

Notes

EDITORIALS

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: IMMIGRATION (90%); HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS (90%); DISCRIMINATION (78%); VISUAL ARTISTS (78%); DEMOCRACIES (71%)

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Industry: ARTISTS & PERFORMERS (90%); VISUAL ARTISTS (78%)

Geographic: CALIFORNIA, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (96%); GERMANY (79%); EUROPE (74%); LATIN AMERICA (56%)

Load-Date: October 25, 2002

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