

# Gifts of grateful wonder

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A Quintana exhibit presents painted thank-you notes to saints, statues and carvings

By NANCY HAUGHT | THE OREGONIAN

THEY ARE THE SHORTEST OF STORIES, ONLY A few lines long. They begin with worry and end in wonder: A soldier, gone for 25 years, comes home alive. A boy who fell into a deep well survives. A woman in poor health delivers a robust child. Each is a glimpse into a life of faith.

These tiny stories are ex-votos, painted thank-you notes to saints who intervened to answer prayers. From a Latin phrase often translated as "from the vow made," ex-votos spread from Italy to the Americas in the 16th century and remained popular expressions of faith through the 20th century.

## Devotional Art of the Americas

**Where:** Quintana Galleries, 120 N.W. Ninth Ave.

**When:** 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, through May 30

**Cost:** Free

**Information:** 503-223-1729, [quintanagalleries.com](http://quintanagalleries.com)

Dozens of ex-votos are part of an exhibit this month at Quintana Galleries in Northwest Portland. "Devotional Art of the Americas" includes carvings, statues and paintings — some dating to the 1700s — from New Mexico, Mexico and Central and South America. It represents a portion of the devotional pieces collected over 25 years by Rose and Cecil Quintana, whose love of indigenous art has fueled their gallery since 1972.

A crucifix from Guatemala may be the highlight of the exhibit. Carved from wood, the cross has knots and whirls like a tree. The figure of Jesus bears several wounds, the face a study in resignation.

But the heart of the exhibit is the 40 ex-votos, which were painted and left at churches and shrines as votive offerings. Painted on tin, each includes an illustration of the problem and a likeness of the saint whose help is sought. Many of them are dedicated to the Virgin Mary. A Spanish caption, written across the bottom of each ex-voto, explains the circumstances of its creation.

"There's something sweet and naive about them," says Cecily Quintana, whose parents collected these ex-votos. Most of the art she and her parents love "is spiritual — whether you're looking at kachinas or ceremonial masks."

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF QUINTANA GALLERIES

## Angry Mother-in-law

"Dulce's mother-in-law seemed to be bewitched," reads the Spanish caption on this undated ex-voto. A priest advised the beleaguered daughter-in-law to give the angry woman tea made from holy water. "Her prayers were answered and her promise kept."

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RETABLO.



SOLDADO EN ESTADOS UNIDOS SIENDO SU MEXICANO.

LA-SRA. NOZVERTA-MORENO, EN-COMENDO-A-TODA-SU-FAMILIA-A-LA-VIRGEN-DE-SAN. JUAN-DE-LOS-LAGO S. STA. CRUCITA-MARTINEZ, Y-STA. VICTORIA-MARTINEZ, Y EL-JOVEN-SALVADOR-MARTINEZ, QUE-PRESTO-SUS-SERVICIOS-AL-EJERCITO-AMERICANO, DE-LOS-ESTADOS-UNIDOS, LIBRANDOSE-DE-TODO-PELIGRO, VIENE-AVISITAR-A-LA-VIRGEN-BEALO-BESTIDO-DE-MILITAR, Y-JOVEN-JESUS-MARTINEZ, EL-JOVEN-JOSE-DE-LA-LUZ-MARTINEZ, Y-SU-PAPA-BR. FAUSTINO-MARTINEZ, Y-SR. VENTURA-MORENO, DAN GRACIAS-A-LA-BENDITA-IMAGEN- DISPUES-DE-25-AÑAS, FUERA-DE-SU-PATRIA-MEXICANA, RADICADOS-EN-LOS-ESTADOS-UNIDOS, PROMETIENDO-ESTE-RETABLO, PUBLICADO-Y-PAGAN-SU-PROMESA. LEON, GTO.

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ABOVE

### Safe Return of Soldier, 1940

The Spanish caption reads that "Mrs. Moreno invoked all of her family to pray" to the Virgin Mary for a family member who had served in the U.S. military. "He was away for 25 years," according to the ex-voto. When he returned, "He went to pay his respect to the Virgin wearing his full military uniform."



LEFT

### Boy Fell From Tree, 1945

A mother picks lice from her daughter's head as her sister sits nearby. Outside the door, a boy – perhaps their brother – falls from a tree. The ex-voto thanks the Virgin Mary because, despite his mother being distracted, the boy escaped serious injury.