

Vibrant art by a vibrant, influential artist

Art + Artists - 2000
Manuel Santana, who died last week at age 81, made a big impact

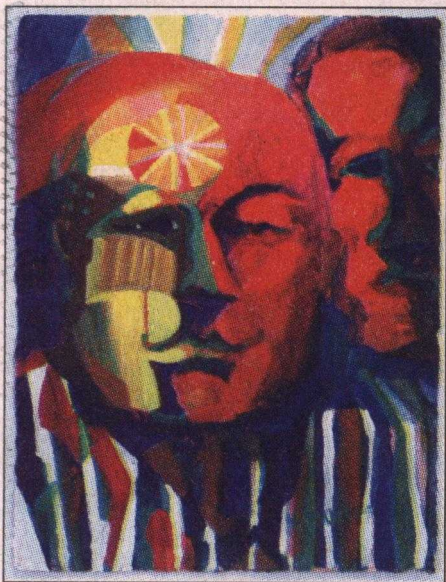
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OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

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Manuel Santana was vibrant, creative and multifaceted.

Santana died of complications from a brief illness last week at age 81, but visitors to four Santa Cruz County Bank branches can see those same qualities in

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Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

A self-portrait by 2008 Artist of the Year Manuel Santa is on display at the Santa Cruz County Bank Watsonville branch, 595 Auto Center Drive.

ARTIST

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his art in a special exhibit honoring Santana as 2008 county Artist of the Year.

Santana, sometimes described as “bigger than life,” played many roles other than artist. Among them were restaurant owner, public servant and father.

Son Leonardo Santana called him a visionary who thought on a different plane and was always involved with community projects, receiving many awards. The honor of Artist of the Year, however, stood apart.

“That’s about the only award that he’s gotten that he was really, really touched with,” Leonardo Santana said. “It was like the culmination of a career.”

Santana’s work, filled with rich reds and greens, was described as “seamlessly” incorporating Mexican traditions and the Judeo-Christian education that “helped shape his consciousness” by art expert Fernando Galvez de Aguinaga. The description was part of Santana’s 2004 exhibit “Impresiones — Arte de Manuel Santana” that Santana, a Los Angeles native who moved to Santa Cruz in 1961, developed in response to a request from the Mexican government.

Galvez de Aguinaga also noted how Santana’s “complex, emotional paintings” morph into something different with each viewing.

Patricia Santana, Leonardo’s wife, called her father-in-law a “magnificent painter.”

“His art to me is so special because it’s not immediate, it’s very complex,” she said. “I’ve seen his art over the years, and we have pieces of his here at home, and still to this day I still see new things in them.”

While Manuel Santana lived to age 81, his career as an artist wasn’t extremely long. After at-



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

ABOVE: “Flags” is an acrylic on masonite painting by Manuel Santana created in 1993. BOTTOM RIGHT: This large acrylic on masonite painting by Manuel Santana is titled “Arranging Flowers.”

tending Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles County, he spent decades away from art until 1989, when he began actively painting and sculpting as he phased out of restaurant management.

Following Manuel Santana’s death, Leonardo and Patricia Santana started receiving many phone calls from people offering condolences.

“He touched a lot of lives,” Leonardo said. “There were a lot of things that he did that he never talked about. But you hear later on from people what an impact on people he had.”

Santana’s list of accomplishments — part of an extensive biography released when he was named Artist of the Year by the Santa Cruz County Arts Commission — is extensive.

He developed two restaurants, Manuel’s in Aptos and Jardines de San Juan in San

Juan Bautista. His community efforts included founding the Martin Luther King Committee at the University of California, Santa Cruz; participating on the UC Water Resources Advisory Board; being a member of the board of directors for Bear Republic Theatre Company and the Family Services Agency in Watsonville; serving on the National Advisory Council on Rural Economic Development; and spending time as president of community-based nonprofit Central Coast Counties Development Corporation.

He also helped organize the first Housing Authority in Santa Cruz County, and was instrumental in the establishment of the Cabrillo Music Festival, for which he served six terms as president, was subsequently made a lifetime board member and inducted into the festival’s

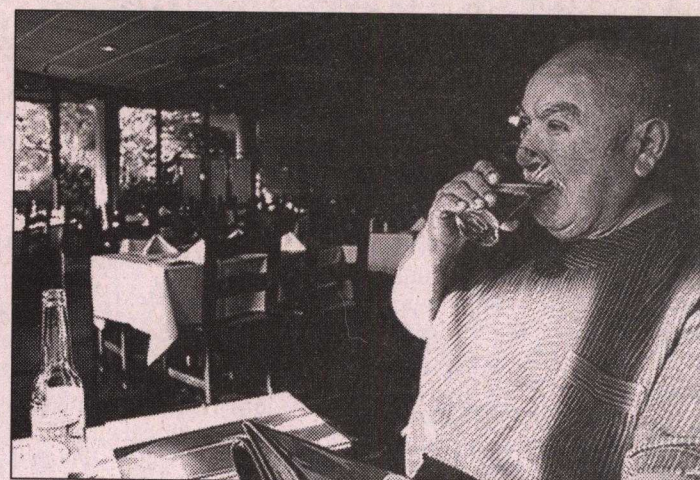
hall of fame.

Santana converted an early California adobe in his San Juan Bautista gardens to serve as a gallery for contemporary women artists. He also donated space there to help facilitate the renowned El Teatro Campesino’s move to its new base on the Central Coast.

“I think there’s no doubt in anybody’s mind who knew him that he was a really special man walking this earth,” Patricia Santana said. “He touched a lot of lives. He will be missed.”

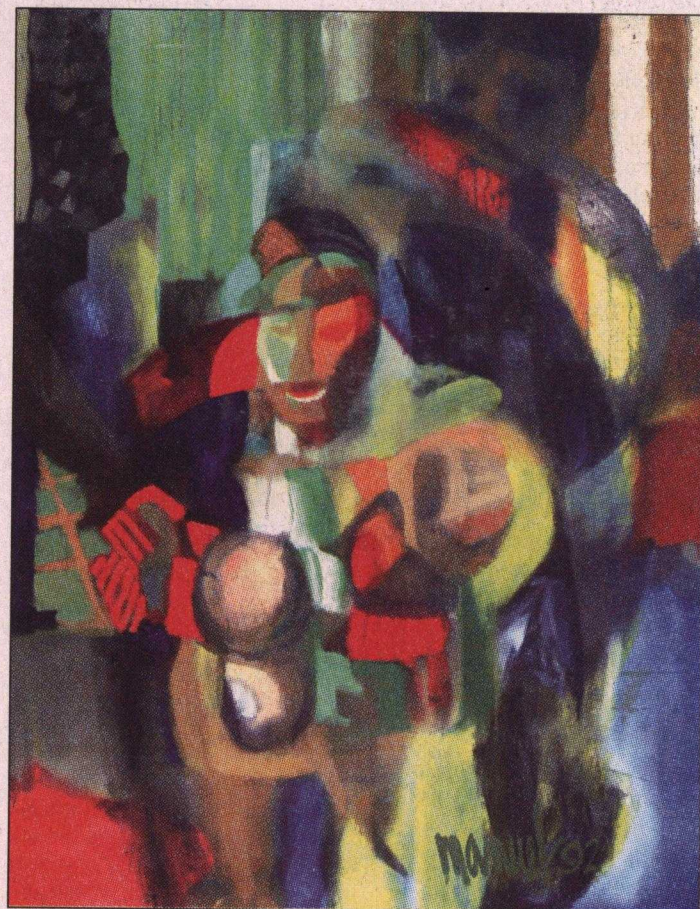
Mary Anne Carson, senior vice president at Santa Cruz County Bank, said the bank’s branch at 595 Auto Center Drive in Watsonville will host a reception in Santana’s memory Sept. 9 from 5-7 p.m. The exhibit, titled “All Santana,” runs through Oct. 31.

“A brilliant light has gone out



Courtesy of Angelina Santana

ABOVE: Manuel Santana, who died last week at age 81, was an artist and restaurant owner. Santana was named 2008 Santa Cruz County Artist of the Year.



in our community and in the art world with Manny’s passing,” Carson said. “We’ve been honored to be able to display his work for the public to enjoy.”

Santana’s family is also mourning his loss. Leonardo

and Patricia Santana lived just five minutes from Manuel, and used to visit him every morning.

“It’s a big void,” Patricia Santana said. “We’ll miss him. He was a big part of our lives.”