



Although it is an impressive and effective means of cultural exchange, the International Collection of Child Art is “not going to save the world,” according to Barry Moore, professor emeritus of art, “but it sure helps.”

Drawn Together

Young artists capture all that's common across continents

BY SUSAN MARQUARDT BLYSTONE

Crayons and culture. There is a long-standing connection between the two at Illinois State University, one that Barry Moore has cultivated for the past two decades as curator of the International Collection of Child Art.

Moore, professor emeritus of art, adopted the collection as if it were his own when he received the official title of curator from the Illinois legislature in 1975. At the time, the collection included 3,500 pieces, and only a dozen countries were represented. Today there are more than 8,000 pieces of artwork from 40 countries. Moore cherishes each creation as much as all parents delight in preserving their own child's doodling. The fact he has never met the young artists whose work he protects and displays in exhibits that circulate around the world does not diminish his enthusiasm for the beauty and truth each piece conveys.

Some are done in pencil, others in paint. Some of the children produce work that is barely more than a scribble. Others clearly show extraordinary development for their age and training. All the pieces are two-dimensional, with

many created using nothing but the color of crayons.

"Crayon is one of the best media, because they can control it and make it do what they want," Moore said of the artists who range in age from two to 20. "Watercolor drives them up the wall because it changes, and they can't control it," he added, noting that clearly "the kids don't need exotic materials" to convey images and emotions tied to their world.

It is responses to simple topics such as "Games I like to play," "Places I like to go," "Getting up in the morning," and "Helping my parents" that make all of the artwork captivating. And as Moore has learned through years of combining the works into exhibits, the pleasure drawn

from viewing the world through a child's perspective is enriched by important lessons the collection as a whole conveys about growing up in different cultures.

"The intention is for scholars to come and study artwork from all over the world," Moore said. Doctoral students at Illinois State and other institutions have used the artworks as the



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conveys about growing up in different cultures.



Previous page, *Breaking the Piñata*, Hugo, 7-year-old male, Mexico; above, *Eating Our Meal*, Ayako, 7-year-old female, Japan; next page, *The Wild Boar*, John, 12-year-old male, New Zealand.

foundation for dissertations that explore such topics as what images and symbols cut across cultures, how children from different countries convey similar concepts, and how the method of teaching art influences the children's visual expressions.

Moore can speak to each issue as well as answer other frequently asked questions, such as how the collection demonstrates the artistic stages a child moves through. He can give the professor's lecture on how children scribble until about age three, at which point symbols are blended into their artwork, and how it is not until about age 12 that realism emerges. He prefers to caution viewers against drawing comparisons of skill by looking for such markers, however, noting that cultural differences in such things as educational opportunities alone create a wide range of artistic development.

"I don't do a comparison across the collection, because each piece is unique,"

he said. Instead he prefers to evaluate every image on its own merit, something he must do when he creates exhibits that have taken as long as two years to prepare. "It takes time because I'm trying to get an exhibit that is an honest representation with a variety of scenes, equal representation of boys and girls, a good span of ages, paintings and drawings, and all in different sizes so that it is visually appealing."

He starts as any artist would, by critiquing the quality of the work. "I have a definition of art, and I don't change it for children," Moore said, relying upon his experiences as a scholar and as an artist himself who is proficient with watercolor and metal enameling. His expertise also stems from a doctorate in art education and experience teaching students from kindergarten through graduate school, including 30 years as a professor at Illinois State.

Moore retired from university teaching in 1992 but remains faithful to his curator duties, which are all done as a volunteer. The work has become more burdensome since the University Museum closed in the late 1980s, at which point Moore lost staff support and the ideal surroundings to store and display the collection. It continues to thrive through the support of the Department of Art and the College of Fine Arts, which house the collection in a room on the first floor of the Center for the Visual Arts. It is there Moore works at everything from cataloging the artwork and its history to framing and protecting each piece, handling all correspondence, and sending out exhibits that he assembles according to his code

of making certain all cultures are represented fairly.

"I look for pieces that show the child's personal experience in an individual style and—most important—are an honest representation of a child's work without having an adult's fist in it," Moore said. The last criteria is frequently the most difficult to control, Moore laments, as all too often the person who oversees the creation of the artwork manipulates the results.

Moore delights in sharing the details of how the work has been assigned and gathered since the collection began in 1970 with the donation of 3,500 paintings from F. Louis Hoover, Illinois State professor emeritus of art and former University Museum director. Moore's personal correspondence with institutions and colleagues around the world elicited additional contributions. Many pieces have come through the Christian Children's Fund, the United States Chapter of UNICEF, Jaycees International, and institutions such as the Leningrad Peace Committee and the Yapi ve Kredi Bankasi in Istanbul.

Nuns in missionary schools in Bolivia have brought back work, as has Moore, who once traded rolls of film for artwork from a Chinese educator. Artworks by Russian children came to Illinois State in a donation from a Wisconsin art professor, who had acquired them in a trade with the USSR for a piece of Sputnik that he recovered after it fell from the sky.

No artwork has ever been purchased, Moore said, making clear that he will not use what children create as a commodity. There is, however, a nominal exhibit rental fee of approximately \$300 that is reinvested in the collection. The money is used to provide art supplies for children who have none and to defray the expense of maintaining the exhibits that have traveled from Indianapolis to Hong Kong. They have hung on the walls of a cancer center at Loyola University Medical Center and

in the halls of Nickelodeon. Among the most popular exhibits requested are ones titled *For the Birds*, *Christmas Around the World*, and *Children Draw Animals*.

Moore is particularly fond of one collection titled *Fun Sports and Games*, which he created by request for display at the 1980 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid, New York. The collection includes a piece titled *Out Fishing* from a young Australian girl, another called *Football* by a teenager in Ecuador, and one called *Lapin Lasten Toiveuni* by a Finnish girl. The work involved in compiling the three, 20-piece exhibits resulted in Moore receiving his own pewter version of an Olympic medal. The exhibit has since circulated widely, including a stint at Soldier Field during the 1994 World Cup games.

Yellowed clippings of reviews from papers as varied as the *South China Morning Post* to *The Cincinnati Enquirer* confirm Moore's claim that

he guarantees will please any audience "through a simplicity that is both intriguing and refreshing."

Moore still chuckles as he pulls out some of the his favorite pieces, all examples of children's creativity and all inspiring with what he calls "a beautiful naïveté" that reaffirms the belief that similarities exist across cultures. It's a message no one can help but see in the collection, which quietly asks why it is that the commonalties so clearly captured by children around the world fade from view so quickly in the world of adults.

It's the one question Moore can't answer directly but which remains key to his motivation in seeing that the collection is kept in the public eye, where it continues to serve as an impressive and effective cultural exchange. "It's not going to save the world, but it sure helps," Moore said, repeating his conviction that, like any good artist, children have a message to convey.

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the collection is better known nationally and around the world than on the Illinois State campus. And although he still uses promotional material written in 14 languages with the help of a colleague in the Department of Foreign Languages, Moore now does very little publicity work. He doesn't need to, as calls still regularly come in for everything from publishers requesting artwork to illustrate books to organizations seeking exhibits that

