1st Quarter 2007
International Association of Astronomical Artists
iaaa.org

Santa Clara Volcano with Mud Pots

2007 Nicaragua Workshop

© Bettina Forget
By Kara Szathmáry

On the Way: Wednesday, Feb 14 2007 – Valentine’s Day

I awoke at 3:49 AM to get ready to go to the airport by 5:00. My flight from Panama City, FL would leave to Atlanta, GA at 6:05, but first I had to get my e-ticket and head to security where it meant taking off shoes, belt, watch, bracelet, necklace, empty pockets of coins, keys, metal pens, et cetera, a general ordeal. After boarding the aircraft, we headed off in the morning dawn, flying northeast to Atlanta. Once above the ever increasing mounds of clouds, due to a major storm system that was sweeping across from the mid west and up through to the northeastern seaboard, gradually the stars faded from sight in the twilight sky, giving way to the sun majestically rising in the east.

Our flight arrived in Atlanta around 8:25 AM local time. I still had another hour and a half of waiting time before the next flight, so I’d enjoy a cappuccino. Finally it was time to go, and I boarded a 737 jet to Managua. Leaving my knapsack in the overhead, I headed to the back to find my seat and along the way I met, shook hands and talked a bit with Bill Hartmann and his wife Gayle. I didn’t see Bettina Forget, nor did I see Mitch Bentley and his wife Cathie. I assumed my seat and waited for take off.

At 9:55 our jet rumbled onto the loading lanes joining eight other Delta aircraft in taxi formation towards the run way on this overcast cloudy Atlanta morning. Eventually we were off, thrusters roaring, pushing us deep into our seats as the aircraft ascended. Once through the clouds, barely fifty or so feet above, I saw the shadow of our airplane with a rainbow glory ring around it. The sun with the clear blue sky held a promise of excitement as we circled around Atlanta and headed south. We would be flying at 36,000 feet, along the western edge of Florida, past Tampa, St Petersburg, and Fort Myers before leaving the coast and into the Gulf of Mexico. We would

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From the Editor:
Hi Gang!
Wow, it looks like the folks who attended the Nicaragua Workshop had a blast! Kara gave a wonderfully detailed report on the listserver that was too good not to pass on to everyone, so...
Jon!
eventually be flying between Cuba and Belize over the Caribbean Sea before reaching the northeastern airspace of Nicaragua and the autonomous Miskito indigenous nation near the Honduran border.

Neither the earlier conquering Spaniards of the 16th century nor the previous early 20th century dictators had ever conquered the Columbian Indian tribe that settled this region 700 years before Columbus. The first Spanish expedition arrived and made landfall about 1500 in search of a route to the great ocean on the west coast. However, this region fell in favor to English and Dutch speaking pirates as they were not interested in conquering the Miskitos as the Spaniards were, but rather the pirates preferred to rely instead on trade for food and water. Centuries in the future, the current Sandanista Luminatos FSLN (The Shining Path Party) also tried to convert the locals into speaking Spanish and submit to Communist rule. Instead the Miskito Nation once again turned to English help by training in southern Honduran mountains with the US military. Fortunately, the fighting has ended, with the public preferring to normalize their society with constructive humanitarianism for all.

From the sights above through my 737 jet window, jungle and a network of rivers appear to be the only means of getting trade with the western Spanish-speaking. Dugout boats and other river crafts meander up the snaking like rivers to towns 50 miles inland. Otherwise airports connected the east and west coasts. The greenery of the eastern coast jungle changed into rolling hills and semi desert landscape within 100 miles from the Caribbean and remained this way westward.

We arrived at Managua Intl. Airport at 12:30 CST into a city filled with corrugated roof tops. Several missionary groups from the US were on this flight who would head northwest and central east to some very poor regions of Nicaragua to help construct churches, schools and other infrastructures. At customs everyone had to pay a $5 visa to enter the country. As I entered the airport, I was greeted by Bettina and one of the hotel employees. She had arrived on an earlier flight so as to avoid being stuck by bad winter weather in Montreal via Atlanta. We talked briefly about when others would be coming. Mitch and Cathie were said to be arriving at 1:30, whereas Betsy Smith had caught an earlier UPS flight the previous day from Louisville, KY instead of returning.

Organizer Erik Viktor
Photo by Dave Hardy
home to Manchester, NH during the snow storm in the east. As a pilot, Betsy carried her workshop gear with her during her working shift; sensible, no?

A few minutes later I ran into her as I marched off to the washroom to take off some of my clothes. Even with a Floridian wardrobe, I was OVER dressed with my black sports coat, black jeans, tee-shirt, shirt and black vest clothing that was my staple back in Quebec, minus a winter coat, gloves and boots. After returning to Bettina and Betsy, Bill and Gayle had arrived with their Peruvian friends, Maria and Samuel. They spoke a level of English I wish I could in Spanish; but, alas I would have to fudge with the slang French Quebecoise I still knew. However, I would have to remember to an “o” to almost every ending or so my naïve mind insisted. While waiting for Mitch and Cathie’s flight, I discussed ‘Cosmic Expressionism - The Land of the Swirlies’ Chapter for our 25th Anniversary Art Book with Bettina and Betsy.

Then we learned that Mitch and Cathie’s flight was delayed until 9:00 PM, so the rest of us gathered our gear and headed out into the humid hot 96F afternoon air to the parking lot to load the hotel bus to Granada, 60 kilometers to the south. The 45-minute bus ride took us part of the way down the Pan-American Highway, past single story buildings with corrugated tin roofs that often resembled sheds, storage area, meager business garage, cantina or run down, poorly maintained family dwellings. Court yards were often surrounded with barb wire fencing, cast iron gates and pilings, and/or stone walls with broken glass bottles at the top as deterrents for trespassers and separate properties for neighborhoods. The streets and ditches as well as the landscape outside of the cities and towns we drove through were littered with plastic bags and debris of all sorts, including bottles, used tires, and broken furniture. Talk filled the bus in route to Granada with what each of us had done since the DV3 workshop to current projects. After our arrival and settling into our rooms at the Hotel Patio de Malinche, we would gather for our first meeting at 5:00 PM to help usher in our itinerary for the next ten days.

Erik Viktor and Dave Hardy greeted our arrival at our hotel in Granada. Dave, while wearing his Icelandic Soviet-American/UK/Canada IAAA tee shirt, arrived a day earlier from his flight from Birmingham, UK, via New York and Houston. Erik took a bus up from Costa Rica where he lives to pursue several business opportunities in Central America. We were told not to convert our currency at the airport for better rates in Granada, we could now do this once we walked up to the center city plaza area three blocks north of our hotel. Along the way we could go to visit our host gallery, the Casa de los Tres Mundos, where our exhibition and art workshops would be hosted. Welcome to Nicaragua!
Day 2, Feb 16 – Nicaragua

Morning came with voices in the court yard heard from the balcony of the second floor. I peeked through the curtains to find out what was going on. Dave was introducing himself to two other people. I quickly dressed and stepped out to also introduce myself, presumably to Mitch and Cathie Bentley who must have arrived late last night. It was indeed them, but minus their luggage which did not arrive with them. They would have to return to the airport and customs later that morning to get their luggage containing clothes and another suitcase full of art—paintings, six 16 by 20 inches original digital words. After breakfast they got Lydia, our hotel matron, to call Customs to clear the luggage over to the airline they had flown with. Customs doesn’t remain open all day; therefore, being in the hands of the airline would make them assessable more easily upon their arrival anytime during the day.

At breakfast we sat down to discuss the day’s itinerary. Dieter Stadler, the Director of the Casa de los Tres Mundos, happened to leave to Europe on some business without notifying Erik that he couldn’t complete his obligations regarding the creation of tags for the paintings, banner production, and the framing of artworks brought by Erik from Costa Rica where he had them printed onto one square meter vinyl canvases including three for Dave and one for Kara. So the obligation to organize the exhibition for its due opening on Friday fell to us for all certainty. This implied that we would first and foremost walk to the gallery this morning after breakfast, so that we could be certain that the framing would begin.

Several artists, namely Bettina, Betsy and Bill, had their artwork to carry over to the gallery; and rather than go off to our first overnight trek to a distant volcano, it was decided to let them select where they would hang their artworks. Of course the
show needed to be set up in such a way that it would be aesthetically pleasing within a unity of differing painting styles. While Bettina, Betsy and Bill caroused the inner courtyard and inner available rooms of the galley space, Erik and I would attend to other details.

Erik introduced us to Ivan, Christoff, Florin, Anya, Nora, Sandra and a few other gallery workers who were from Austria and Germany fulfilling their military service obligations as civil-servants in various countries throughout the world. They were stationed here in Nicaragua for their 18-month stints. It turns out that Germany in particular has sister city relationships between the two countries. At any rate, Ivan et al would be manning the computers and the technology during our stay, this included creating a radio announcement in both Spanish and English to be played every two hours during our week’s exhibition stay. Fernando Lopez, the Cultural Director, was also introduced to each of us once he arrived to the center. He was left in charge during Dieter’s surprise absence to oversee the success of our exhibition.

The Casa was now abuzz with activity. Betsy and Bettina discovered the Internet café next door to the gallery and utilized both the internet telephone and e-mail facilities as they needed. Once the radio text was drafted, Ivan, Florin and Christoff asked me to verify the message and/or include or omit what I deemed unclear. Bettina in the meantime was selected by the gallery workers as the English voice for the commercial. Yes indeed, she

Sonoma Canyon  Photo by Dave Hardy
was in her element, not just with her artist comrades, but also with her fluency of German. The Spanish version would be recorded by another staff gallery employee. The plan was to release and air the commercial every half hour initially for a 24-hour period until the exhibition's 7:00 PM opening on Friday night. Meanwhile Fernando informed us that there would be a press conference planned with the local media for 3 PM later this afternoon with Erik (Workshop Coordinator), Kara (President/Chair), Dave (Euro-VP, artist & writer, Rudaux recipient) and Bill (Senior scientist, artist & writer, Rudaux recipient) to round out the composition of this IAAA panel.

The work proceeded all morning. At some point I learned from Erik about the hardship that the gallery was experiencing regarding funding. Dieter had gone unexpectedly to a board meeting in Europe where he would request more educational funding for the 80-year old institute for various programs, the staff and the services that the Casa de los Mundos provided for the impoverished culturally deprived community in and about region of Granada. The staff, including the resident artists, didn't know whether they would be paid for their work in the coming weeks, nor whether the programs would continue on track as they had been working feverishly in support to provide. The Casa provided art lessons, music training both singing and instruments, and performance art programs to street kids. They also helped rebuild projects after last year's hurricanes that led to mud slides in nearby villages. Erik asked whether we would consider the idea of making a donation for the help being provided for us during our stay.

I broached the subject with our IAAA artists and collectively we discussed the pros and cons of the idea. The consensus we felt was that it would be for a very good cause and we agreed to pitch in to donate $500 to the educational programs to Fernando Lopez, the Cultural Director of the Casa de los Tres Mundos, who was currently funding his staff out of his own pocket. I suggested that we would announce the presentation of this donation from the IAAA at the opening on Friday night. Bettina accepted to volunteer to type up the document while I would raise the funds. I also approached Gayle Hartmann's Peruvian friends, Maria and Samuel, to help with Spanish translations for the formal text expressing our appreciation and gratitude for the hosting of our group exhibition and the symbolic check on the back of my painting, “Surprize – In the Realm of Infinity.”
Our first lunch took 15 of us, as an entire group including friends and staff of the Casa, through the streets of Granada to their favorite eatery. It was quite the third world village street scene that we experienced. Some carts with wooden wheels, others with bald tires, pulled wagons with various sorts of items including branches from trees, sacks of grains, bricks, and various other things to the street market place. The water flowing down the street curbs often had algae and moss mixed in with discarded trash of various sorts. Skeletal dogs lay sleeping on the roads next to the curbs and moved only when a honking horn of a car raced down upon them.

After lunch at the staff’s local favorite restaurant, we arrived back at the gallery for further planning. Name tags would be needed. The night before, while Erik, Bettina and I designed the banner selecting text, font, style and color, Dave agreed to let us use one of his paintings. Meanwhile, I sent an urgent e-mail to BJ whether he could provide us with a large high-res IAAA logo. What was available at the iaaa.org website was way too small. This arrived in quick order which delighted me immensely. Ivan e-mailed the pdf file to a Managua printing shop and the banner would be ready for tomorrow.

At 3:00 PM the press conference began with Erik, Dave, Bill and I sitting at the front central table. The media sat in the front row facing the head table, while interested listeners including guests, artists, gallery staff and the general public sat in behind in extra rows. Fernando Lopez called everyone to order and introduced Erik as the workshop organizer and coordinator. After I brief overview as to our mission and exhibition, he introduced me as the president/chair of the IAAA. I spoke about our early beginnings from 1983, in that we had grown to approximately 160 members from 23 countries, and what we as artists in the genre did as to our raison d’etre, then introduced Dave as our Euro-VP to speak about our philosophy and the space art historical roots. Speaking about how the genre initially formed and how our organization held workshops throughout the world at various geological locations that were analogues of extra terrestrial worlds, Dave introduced Bill as a...
senior scientist, writer and artist. Bill then talked about how we did our art through stories he had successfully used at previous venues of how to visualize what we don’t see as scientists, despite making scientific measurements. Its one thing to measure some geological features and gather data via satellite and space crafts, BUT, what does it mean and what does look like? This introduction for the press and media then followed a question and answer session.

In the closing moments of the press conference, I invited the media, guests and the public to come to our opening and later to an evening power point presentation I would give on Sunday about our ‘Cosmic Vision’. In the plaza, the images of my talk would be projected onto a while wall while I would speak and an interpreter would relate my story as well as another presentation that would follow by Mitch. Sunday evening could include other opportunities of going to various website locations Bill had spoken about where data and extra terrestrial landscapes we use and interpret come from, for local and national artists. With so many questions and hopeful expectations from the media, I would have the opportunity to introduce Bettina to speak about her art form; Mitch to speak about art history, the genre of space art as initially rendered by Vatican Jesuits in the 17th century and graphic art in general as introduced by Dave as a new medium instrument; and finally Betsy, the grand prize recipient of the EuroMIR’s First International Space Art Exhibition in orbit. Her artwork
remained onboard the MIR Space Station for an entire year. In this fashion, all seven IAAA artists would be recognized, acknowledged and have the opportunity to explain and interpret the intentions of their artwork.

In the very late afternoon, we all went back to the hotel to regroup and go out for supper at a pizzeria a couple of blocks away. After supper, those of us who were still feeling jet lag, or still missing their luggage as was the case for Mitch and Cathie, went back to the hotel. Meanwhile, Erik, Bettina, Bill, Gayle, Maria, Samuel and I headed off to a latino club for some salsa music. No sooner did we get there, sit and order a round of drinks, Bettina was swooped up to dance a sultry tune by a local caballero. What a trooper! The music was loud and the evening humidly hot. An hour or so of this, everyone else decided to call it a night and headed off. Meanwhile, Erik and I stayed on as Ivan, Christof, Florin, Sandra and Anya arrived. By midnight Erik and I decided to pack it in, so we left and made our way back to the hotel.

Day 3, Feb 16 —
Exhibition Opening and Vernisage

The morning began early with breakfast at 7:30 and off to the gallery by 9:00. Mitch and Cathie had finally received their paintings from Customs as well as their clothes. The morning was spent organizing the layout of the art in the court yard. Bettina was busy making art labels and printing text of which I asked her added help to organize. We agreed to give “Cosmic Vision” as the title to our group exhibition and to have the gallery staff type out English and Spanish announcement of the exhibition at the Casa de los Tres Mundos entrance. Meanwhile, the radio announcements continued playing every half hour on a local music channel. Betsy was busy drawing and creating watercolor sketches in the surrounding territory but checking in to see whether her immediate help was needed anywhere. It was good to know where everyone was at all times.

The afternoon work continued for the final countdown. Amy Hartmann and husband Joe Gordon had finally arrived to Nicaragua and taxied over from Managua, and joined Gayle and their party for some
sight seeing in and about Granada. Bill in the meantime had decided to take a siesta and had gone back to his hotel room with a continued sore throat and general fatigue. Cathie and I had gone over to a near by bank a few blocks north of the Casa, leaving Mitch to finalize his paintings and text. Cathie wanted to buy a tape recorder to capture the general sounds of the country during our stay as part of her college project. She also needed some more cash, which was deposited into her account the day after their departure. I too needed a bit more Cordoba, but more so, I was looking for name tag holders in some hopeful stationary shop for our delegation. The afternoon siesta begins after lunch, about 2:00 and lasts ‘til about 4:00. The heat of the day with the 95F temperature, strong sun and coupled with stifling humidity was wreaking havoc on all of us. We all agreed that we would return to the gallery by 5:00 to finalize our evening plans. I went back to the hotel for an afternoon swim, change of clothes, to rehearse my presentation and to think about what I would say at the exhibition evening opening.

Around 5:00 all the artists had returned from their perspective side trips and reassembled at the gallery. Everything was finally in place. This lead time gave us all a chance to attend to our personal needs as well as get cleaned up for the evening. Bill had also returned from his siesta, but sat elsewhere within the gallery to finish up some e-mail regarding his research and to wait for his party to return from their outing.

Before re-joining the group, I spoke to Fernando Lopez with Erik to inform him that the IAAA would like to make a donation to the education program of the institute. I mentioned that it was my intent to announce this tonight but that the actual physical presentation would be made on Sunday before the media after my presentation. This would provide further opportunity to have a photo opt available. He agreed that this would be ideal for Sunday and would see to it that the press did come to this event as well.

By 7:00 PM we had all returned to the gallery having discussed our plans for tomorrow and the week ahead. Erik had confirmed that he would be leaving to return to Costa Rica for his appointment with his surgeon in San Jose. Not long after our arrival, the public continued to come and go into the gallery to view the exhibition. The 3 by 12 feet IAAA banner was spectacular and hung outside the gallery announcing the exhibition venue. The press began...
to arrive, seeking out Erik as our Spanish speaking spokes person. I listened to their questions and answers then asked the journalist that he make the opportunity to speak directly to Bettina Forget about her art form; Betsy Smith who had received the first place EuroMIR ’95 art award; and then Mitch Bentley who was an art historian who could give an explanation of the rise of this genre as well as view his digital work he had brought with him to Granada. Several artists were now enveloped with media people and interest groups about their artwork. Hand signaling, facial gestures and stranger still, vain attempts in Spanish, circled the constant trials to converse in English, until an interpreter would arrive. Erik and a few of the gallery staff included Armand, a resident Nicaragua artist, managed to salvage the opportunities to be understood by the press.

The four walls of the inner court yard of the gallery had the public milling about, looking at the art works, discussing the various concepts they were seeing and reading of the artists’ biographies and enjoying the drinks and snacks available at the service bar. Around 8:00 PM, Señor Fernando Lopez drew the crowd’s attention, summoned Erik and I to the podium, then asked me to round up all the IAAA artists to the front. Fernando announced opening of the week long exhibit and introduced Erik as the Workshop Coordinator. Erik spoke for a while about the genre of space art and the impact of this art upon the community. I was introduced as the president and after a brief comment on the privilege of exhibiting at the Casa, I pointed out that on Sunday there would be further media presentations in the evening by way of a presentation by me and Mitch Bentley. I invited them to that opportunity to see how we as artists pursue this legacy of space art. At that point I introduced each and every artist with a little

Watercolor study of Nidiri by Bettina Forget
summary background of their accomplishments.

Finally, I drew the audience’s attention, on Sunday, the IAAA would formerly present a donation of $500 to the education program of the Casa de los Tres Mundos via the Cultural Director, Fernando Lopez, to continue their superb work in providing and stimulating the cultural activities of the Granada. Fernando then thanked the IAAA artists and asked the audience to enjoy the balance of the evening.

With this formality behind us, we all left for supper around the corner passing a Thai restaurant called the Third Eye. The initial plan would take us down a street that was severely run down and filled with dilapidated structures and houses. Even this street was riddled with pot holes, telephone poles and wire that were more from the 1930s and 1940s than what we see outside in the first nations. People, families sat outside socializing while young toddlers played street games in the dark and sometimes unsupervised, or so it often appeared. The little travel eatery that we first went to was full, so we turned around and headed back up the street to the Third Eye. How wonderful it felt to sit at long last, converse and reminisce about the successful events leading up to the opening. Tomorrow our first exploratory venture into the countryside would begin.

By 10:45 we were all back at the hotel, as we would be having breakfast early at 7:30 in order to catch a bus to go to Masaya Volcano National Park for our first extreme adventure outside of Granada.

Day 4, Feb 17 – The Masaya Excursion

We gathered after breakfast to board our tour bus to our first excursion 30 km north of Granada—Masaya Volcano National Park. We asked Ivan and several of the Casa staff to come and join us and share our adventure together for the day.

The ride over gave us another opportunity to see the rural region leading up to Managua International Airport. Once again the countryside revealed the pointed third world poverty of Nicaragua, yet there was charm in the difficult lifestyle of the people. People were milling about, waiting in lines for a bus, many making there way to work, to markets, either with ox carts pulling enormous piles of tree branches, bricks, grain et cetera, donkey, mule
or horse led wagons delivering lumber, clay tiles, or trucks over loaded with laborers and/or fellow travelers. School children, in white and navy blue uniforms, headed to near by schools. The morning bustle was seen everywhere including people tending to their yards, sweeping walkways, pruning trees and/or hedges or burning garbage at the side of the road. Husbandry animals roamed somewhat freely about homes, courtyards, entrance ways and ditches in search of grass during this winter dry season. The horizontal red & black bands of FSLN flags were everywhere: in trees, on telephone poles, billboards, and even outside entrances to buildings including outhouses all celebrating Daniel Ortega’s re-election in November 2006.

Even the traffic was frenetic, passing on curves, columns of slow moving vehicles whether leading or on-coming without a worry of colliding. The rule appeared to be to never hesitate or else let dozen vehicles over take you at anytime or place on the road! Occasionally, we might see a policeman standing off side discretely at a major traffic circle, eyeing potential gringo drivers - a local and/or national money machine. Otherwise, drivers did as they pleased or so it seemed - keep moving, ever faster, honking their horns at pedestrians angling across the road, some running in desperation, others traumatized not knowing which direction to look out for. The ‘ALTO’ signs only stopped foreigners; otherwise any hesitation by a driver to slow was a sign of timid weakness of character and was taken advantage of as a dozen other vehicles would fill the vacant asphalt in nanoseconds. Amazingly the speed limit was 50 km/per on the rollercoaster by way in towns and ‘blur’ km/hr elsewhere. Fortunately, our bus driver kept to the established international rules, yet even he, a native Costa Rican, knew hesitation special relativity rules.
We arrived at the park entrance with the Masaya Crater looking down at us in the distance. The entrance fee per person was 70 Cordoba, ~$4. Within a mile we had stopped at our first lava flow field - a large expanse of lava from a large eruption from 1772. After taking time to stretch, photo shoot and general grounding, we set our minds to the task of eventually doing some art in the area, but first, some sight seeing. We proceeded to the visitor center welcoming the curious to Masaya Volcano National Park, one of Nicaragua’s most interesting and beautiful natural phenomena. Established in 1979 as the country’s second national park, it comprises an area of 54 km² with more that 20 km of scenic roads and trails, leading to and around the two impressive volcanoes and formidable craters. The Masaya Volcano, called by Indians ‘Popogatepe’ meaning “mountain that burns,” emerges from the center of the Park. One of its craters, Santiago, shows gaseous activity and incandescent lava in its interior.

A brief history states that during the pre-Columbian age, Masaya Volcano was an object of veneration by the indigenous people. They believed the eruptions were signs of anger from the gods and to appease them they offered sacrifices, which often included small children and...
maidens. Later, during the Conquest of 1522, the Spaniards baptized the active volcano La Boca del Inferno - the Mouth of Hell. They then planted a cross, La Cruz de Bobadilla, named in honor of Father Francisode Bobadilla. It was placed on the crater lip in the 16th century in order to exorcise the Devil. The volcano was visited by a number of Spaniards in search of “the gold of the volcano.” Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo in 1529 and Friar Blas del Castillo in 1538 were among the unsuccessful excavators, lowering themselves 800 meters into the crater by rope. (Oh my, what greed can inspire in fools!) In 1670, the Nindiri volcano made its last eruption followed by the Masaya volcano in 1772. The lava formed by this eruption spilled out and over the rim and advanced like a river of fire to the area now known as Piedra Quemada or burned rock. In 1852, a new crater, Santiago was formed between the existing volcanoes.

The displays within the welcome center included paintings involving the arrival of the Spanish Conquistadors, Indian legends of survival, ancient native burial pottery that were placed in caves within the craters, geological models with explanation of how Nicaragua formed with the subduction of the Cocos oceanic plate beneath the Caribbean tectonic plate, and the flora, fauna, birds and stuffed animals in the territories.

After this viewing, we all climbed back onto the bus and continued another five or so miles of winding paved road way to the parking lot a the base of the crater lip and the foot of Bobadilla’s 1522 cross. A danger sign at the edge of the crater informed everyone to hide beneath any cars and vehicles as a warning should an eruption happen. Camera clicking and video clips churned as the spectacular view of the Santiago volcano opened before us from the eastern crescent edge, steam vents and magna below. To get a better view and to find a spot from where to begin a plein-air rendition we all headed up the slopes of the 1772 Masaya Crater.

Once up there, the panorama of the multi crater zone took relevance. Located in a geodynamic environment dominated by the convergence of the Cocos and the Caribbean plates and the production of calc-alkaline magma, the caldera of Masaya has basaltic magma of a theodolitic composition. Equally
unusual for basaltic magma is the explosive activity, with the formation of Plinian columns and pyroclastic flows. This activity coexists in the Masaya caldera along with the effusive eruptions more typical of basaltic magma. Because of the presence of the caldera, created by repeated collapses of the magma dome from the rapid emissions of large quantities of magma, Masaya is considered a kind of basaltic equivalent of Indonesia’s Krakatau. The Santiago crater occasionally fills with a lava lake, which is active for periods that run from weeks to years. In 1989 a lava lake about 165 feet in diameter appeared following the collapse of the rocks that formed the floor of the crater. The lake formed 985 feet below the rim of the crater.

The activity, including the formation of small lava fountains, indicated the process of degassing and lasted only five weeks. The most recent activity began in June 1993 with the formation of a new lava lake, by now solidified, the surface of which was located about 165 feet lower than the 1989 lake. The southern section of the caldera, some three miles, is occupied by a lake with a sandy beach, Masaya Lagoon, called Venecia where you can go swimming and which supplies drinking water to the city of Masaya. The Masaya caldera is also home to an enormous colony of green parrots.

The Masaya Crater is no longer active and the sterile interior has begun to fill with dwarf trees and vegetation. It is a bit smaller than the Ubehebe Crater in Death Valley, but no entry into the valley floor is permitted. I decided to join Betsy and Bettina to attempt my first sketch of

**Watercolor of Somoto Canyon**

*by Betsy Smith*
the excursion. I decidedly focused on the western wall of the crater, where I happened to notice a cave. Despite the strong winds, I stood in defiance on the rim, and began to sketch, wondering whether this cave was once the resting place of a local shaman? My scale was defined by four marks descending from the southwest peak on the distant western crater rim where some people had walked to have a look over the horizon at the Masaya Lagoon. Aaaahhh, the cave was about six feet in diameter. The twenty minute sketch gave an idea of the enormity while enduring strong winds, fleeting clouds and merciless sun as I got burned on the face and the arms.

By noon, it was agreed that all the artists and Casa staff employees needed to be rounded up to go off to lunch. I found Bill, sitting silently painting, beneath a canopy of a large tree, the savanna grass and the northern view of Santiago volcano amid clouds of sulfuric gas. Later that afternoon, we’d travel to San Jose de Oriente near Catrina, just south of the city of Mayasa, to a village where 90% of the population were potters; and, to take in a tour of one of the studios of a master potter of the area. We boarded the bus and headed off to the central market of the village of Masaya. The revolution begun in 1979 was won in this town where the Sandanistas executed the former presidential ‘pig.’ The red & black flags of the rebels waved in the wind and littered tree tops from every direction.

After lunch we headed off to the artisan village of San Jose de Oriente, and to the studio of a master potter who explained the pottery business. His son, Luis, demonstrated their technology on an old manual pottery wheel with mud/clay transported from a nearby volcanic source in batches of 100 kg loads by mules. Once made, each piece, pots and plates, were air dried in cotton cloth to absorb water until 70% of the moisture
was removed, then placed into a hearth that was fired and fueled with a special hardwood. The wood itself required additional drying once collected so as to not have any additional moisture. These items would then go into the hearth at high temperatures for overnight baking. Cathie and Bettina both were offered an opportunity to give a try at making a pot using this set up. Eventually we all headed back to their front store to purchase items of interest.

By 4:30 PM we were back on the bus and heading back to the Masaya volcano for a special evening reservation. But first, a side trip to the Mayasa Lagoon for a ten minute stop was in order. The siesta time found the entire community, along with tourists, songsters, merchants and kids hawking for mutual handouts of any sorts. Amusement park atmosphere abound in the cooling air of sundown.

Back at the Masaya Volcano National Park entrance we found we were locked out, until we announced that we had an appointment, were late, and agreed to commit another 100 Cordoba a piece for a guided evening nocturnal tour that required a park ranger. Then and only then were we allowed to drive around the exit gate to the front office to pay our fees and pick up our guide, Gloria. Well, the tour stars with a visit to the crater wall, up the staircase to Bobadilla’s cross planted in 1522 to note the Gateway to Hell and then as it got dark, we were taken down to the Santiago volcano rim edge to watch the green parakeets, or chocoyos, coming home to roost within the vertical walls of the crater. To avoid vultures, these birds have adapted to the sulfur smoke from the volcano and actually live within the crater walls they burrow into, ten feet deep at night. During the day the birds are out finding food, but around sunset they return to their nests. As the parakeets roost, the second attraction is to watch a large number of bats massively depart from their caves, another great natural spectacle!

We got to see this by boarding the bus and having it drive us over to the western rim parking lot. From there, after each of us received a hard hat and head lamp, we descended into the savanna grass and shrubbery onto the western slope of the crater and into an iguana and snake spit to see a crack like crevice tunnel from which a zillion horde of bats were zooming in and out of the crawl space cave chamber. The smell was something else, with an uneasy feeling of being a ‘supermarket for predators’ we didn’t want to know. What followed next was a visit to an underground tunnel which was formed by lava streams. The entrance was about eight feet in diameter, snarled with tree roots meandering about the face walls seeking water and/or moisture of any sorts. The roots extended far into the cave, busting the walls here and there as they wiggled their way inside.

This cave too had bats flying out of it like horizontal rain. And there we stood, AMAZED, by the lack of any noise, collisions and general
star streaming whizzing by, stopped momentarily in the flash of cameras clicking in the darkness. The cave descended into a moist cave ~200 feet deep and 18 feet below the surface. Once near the end, deep in the cave, Gloria asked us to shut off our lambs to save our power sources. She mentioned that shaman used to bring rituals to the cave to offer food and produce to the hag of the volcano. When her spirit came, she would reveal events of the future to the priests. In thanks and gratitude for the oracles, the worshippers would walk up and out of the cave and back to the western edge of the crater, from where they would sacrifice maidens and children by tossing them 1000 feet down into the lava hole entrance at the bottom of the active volcano.

The tour in fact ends with a visit to the rim edge and a small viewpoint from which we were allowed to see, while wearing a gas mask given by armed park rangers, the red glow of hot lava in the bottom of a recently formed crater. The light from the hot lava gave an eerie glow against the crater walls.

Everyone looked very much like the Sandpeople creatures of Star Wars. While this was going on, I was stunned by the majestic view of Orion, with sword and belt almost overhead in the sky, and the deep southern sky surrounding Canopus. Unfortunately, the lights of the villages to the west, sprawling to the Pacific Ocean horizon, cancelled any obvious viewing of the Large Magellanic Cloud, our nearest galactic neighbor.

We arrived back at the Hotel Patio del Malinche at 9:00 PM. Tired, but happy with our adventures.
Day 5, Feb 18 – Free time in Granada with Evening Presentations

At 6:00 AM morning was broken when there was a gentle knock at my door. Erik had risen, and had come to get his backpack, which I agreed to store in my room. You see, Erik had vacated his room two days earlier since the rooms were booked so very fast in late and early November. Rather than sacrifice one of the late IAAA bookings, Erik agreed to surrender his room! For two nights he slept where he could; first at the Casa staff residence, then in a hammock in the court yard of our hotel, where we talked long into the night while geckos watched us below. What a gentleman!

He related to me with no uncertain terms that he poked out his eye tightening a spring whilst changing the pads of his rear brake-drums. The subsequent operation revealed that the hit with his fists combined with the double 90 degree cut into his eye by the pliers blew the pupil lens and the retina out of the eye. His appointment wasn't for a follow up but rather an emergency operation which he was urged to go to after an eye-scan had revealed that unlike what they had originally thought, the retina was completely dislodged. The knock at my door was to pass him his backpack and await his taxi to the bus station. I hugged him farewell, and promised to pray for his successful recovery, then tried to get back to sleep. Yet the graphic image of the night before, of his dilemma, still stirred deep within me.

Today was intentionally designed to be a free day. Roam the city, the region and/or work at the art studios of the Casa de los Tres Moundos as a participant in their workshops. Breakfast this morning was delayed to later than usual, in order to catch up on much needed sleep and share the news of Erik’s early morning departure and eminent surgery in San Jose on Monday. Out prayers went out to him. It was Sunday, so, the stores and businesses would be closed while people milled about in the central park, plazas or attending church services.

I arrived to the Casa a little after 10. Already Bill was working on one of his paintings in the gallery courtyard, when he approached me to introduce me to another member of the media wanting an interview. With that he left, and I went numb wondering how I would converse with him? Nor did he speak Hungarian! The best I could do was wave my hands about, and
gesture; nor could the only Casa office helper there this morning, who barely spoke a smidgen of English. By then Dave had arrived and I asked him whether he could find someone more skilled in the back studios. Eventually he returned with Armand, a Granada artist. I explained through him how explorers often took artists with them in their tall ships to the new world to document the new continental worlds and islands. Images of buffalo, colorful wild turkeys and painted Indians in their primitive clothes pointed out a snippet of the new world. Or consider Albrecht Dürer, the Renaissance artist, who about 1520 had received a letter and a description of a rhinoceros from a friend while visiting the Royal Zoo in Lisbon. The creature hadn’t been seen by anyone in northern Germany. Dürer’s image, a woodcut and a lined drawing, was based on scant information from the letter and for the next 200 years, it was all that Europeans would have to define this exotic beast. Today space artists are doing the same sort of thing, taking space data to show what these continental islands are like in the solar system.

I introduced Dave as the oldest space artist, a master of the genre, who had been painting since 1952. Dave spoke about his painting that depicted a space craft landing on a comet. Since the principals of geology are the same everywhere in the solar system, space artists use exotic Earth analogues to illustrate such occurrences. It wasn’t just fictitious imagination, but what people would expect to be out there. Aside from giving inspiration of other worlds and space travel to the people, space artists also provide “eyes” of these worlds where one cannot yet travel to; but spacecraft

![Mud Pot!](Photo by Dave Hardy)
do with sophisticated scientific instruments that send their digital images back to Earth. After guiding the journalist to other IAAA artists that began to arrive, I left to enjoy a few Victoria at the Internet Café next door and to check my e-mail, then go off to find some cardboard at the stationary.

A couple of hours later, the Casa was empty. The sky had clouded over, and an unexpected rain storm broke over the city. The interior of the gallery was drenched and the wind had sent several of Erik’s paintings off their hangers. Fortunately I was there and could quickly adjust them back into position. I took advantage of the quiet stillness of the gallery to craft a sign that I would use later in the evening after my presentation.

Once finished, and the rain had eased, I left to walk the streets, which was now ablaze with people socializing in the central park, some singing inside the cathedral during a church service, and/or others sitting in the street in front of their homes. A constant chatter and laughter could be heard from all directions, including megaphones from loudspeakers strapped onto vehicles rumbling through the streets with their announcements. Eventually I made my way back to the hotel to continue to rehearse my evening presentation. A rendezvous time was etched into everyone’s memory as to when we would reconvene.

*Home and Hearth*
A gorgeous view of a habitable moon of a ringed planet.  
by Mitch Bentley
About 6:30 PM we headed back up to the Casa de los Tres Mundos gallery. Christopher, Ivan and Florin were setting up a projection screen outside the plaza made of mesh cheese cloth, which was rolled onto two 10-foot rectangular boards. The mesh was unrolled then stretched around two vertical columns and pinned to the wall beneath the second floor veranda with two other boards, which helped to restrict access to the casual walker going by. From inside a gallery room, on a table, the computer projected an image of my White Dwarf Studio logo. The computer was arranged to reverse the power point presentation so the viewers would not see the images and artist’s name & credit backwards on the screen. The seats were placed outside in the plaza in four rows of ten chairs, which began to fill by people milling about.

By now darkness had swallowed the day and streetlights lit up the region surrounding plaza. Nora, my interpreter had arrived with a swarm of Casa staff and friends. Bill and Gayle with entourage had similarly arrived. The seats began to fill. Nora informed me that she was uncomfortably shy to provide interpretation alone and so would like to have another colleague join her. The two would together read sections of my text, which they had translated to Spanish over the past few days, once I signaled them to speak to an image on the screen. I agreed.

Finally Señor Fernando Lopez had arrived – Showtime! He welcomed the audience to the evening presentation and then introduced me to the crowd. Nora and friend joined me at the side. I positioned myself so as to see Christopher and Florin, whom I would cue inside the projection room to manually change to the next slide with a press of a computer key. While I rehearsed my presentation, I had made additional extra short notes LOOK OUT!! SANDINISTAS!! Or are they? ... ;-) Photoshopped by Dave Hardy
to tidy the talk between slides, about specific artists or scientific concepts. These add-ons wouldn’t be known to the interpreters, nor did they feel competent to want to attempt to translate these words spontaneously. They also didn’t know when to pause for effect, or to adlib my extra comments, so at these points they went ahead, with me trailing behind the original text and image. Certainly, the dance of words and images, interwoven with English and Spanish, then switching to streams of Spanish and English had to have captivated the audience, since the mesh screen didn’t do justice to the clarity, tonality and the color of the art images. Yet the presentation went well, despite the elements for the engagement. After a nice applause from the audience with the IAAA listening and cheering me on, I signaled to Fernando Lopez to come forward along with one of the two female interpreters.

Bettina had brought my painting, ‘Surprize’ forward from the gallery and now brought it up to me. On the backside, I had drawn a check with our IAAA logo, our full name in Spanish, for an amount of $500 and duly signed by me as the president. I did this earlier in the day during a rare early afternoon rain shower during the dry season when I couldn’t find a stationary opened to buy some poster board. In effect, I would be also donating my painting to the institute as well on this 80th anniversary of the Casa’s foundation. I presented the check and the painting to Fernando with the following words: “In gratitude and appreciation for their support of our exhibition at the institute, the International Association of Astronomical Artists would like to present a $500 donation for the educational program of Casa de los Tres Mundos to Mr. Fernando Lopez, Cultural Director.” This was read in Spanish to the audience while Fernando shook hands with camera flashes capturing the moment of exchange.

Mitch was then introduced as the next presenter. His work focused on the exploration of some alien landscape of an animation movie which he had created and wrote the music score in the background. Several other projects featured his artwork and themes he had on exhibition here at the gallery. His graphics expertise certainly revealed his mastery of the medium. Not having arranged for an interpreter, Mitch managed to deliver only three of four projects he brought with him but he ended his talk when he saw the crowd thinning and the lateness of the hour. The evening drew to a successful close, and in celebration we decided to feast on another Thai menu at the Third Eye in the Palm restaurant. During our supper, we voiced a boisterous toast to Erik with the hope for the successful operation on his eye in Costa Rica. To Erik, Salute!

Continued Next Issue......
WHERE IN THE WORLD?...

So where in the world was this pictures taken?....

On the Li River in Guilin, China! (Well done to Dave Hardy for recognizing it...)

The region and city of Guilin is world-renowned for its amazing scenery of limestone karst mountains with two meandering rivers crossing through. “Guilin” means “forest of Sweet Osmanthus”, owing to the large number of fragrant Osmanthus trees located in the city.

The scenery is reputed by many Chinese to be the “finest under heaven.” The many limestone towers are often depicted in Chinese artwork and each has a fanciful name; Elephant Trunk Hill, Piled Festoon Hill, Crescent Hill, Fubo Hill, Hill with a Hole, Camel Hill, Yearning-for-Husband’s-Return Rock, just to name a few.

The hills were formed when limestone sediments were thrust up out of the sea bottom to more than 200 meters above the surface between 200 and 180 million years ago. Wind and rain began the slow but constant work of erosion, molding the hills and rocks into the unusual shapes seen today.

If you should ever get to go there, definitely take a camera!

Text & images from various web sites and by Jon Ramer.
A lunar eclipse occurs whenever the Moon passes through some portion of the Earth’s shadow, which happens at least twice a year, when the Sun, Earth and Moon are aligned exactly, or very closely so, with the Earth in the middle.

A partial lunar eclipse occurs when only a portion of the Moon enters the umbra. When the Moon travels completely into the Earth’s umbra, one observes a total lunar eclipse.

The Moon’s speed through the shadow is about one kilometer per second (2,300 mph), and totality may last up to nearly 107 minutes.

The total time between the Moon’s first and last contact with the shadow is much longer, and could last up to more than 6 hours.

The Moon does not completely disappear as it passes through the umbra because of the refraction of sunlight by the Earth’s atmosphere into the shadow cone; if the Earth had no atmosphere, the Moon would be completely dark during an eclipse.

The red coloring arises because of the scattering of sunlight in the Earth’s atmosphere. Sunlight reaching the Moon must pass through a long and dense layer of the Earth’s atmosphere, where it is scattered by dust particles. Shorter wavelengths are more likely to be scattered by the small particles, and so by the time the light has passed through the atmosphere, the longer wavelengths dominate. This resulting light we perceive as red.

The last lunar eclipse happened on 3 March 2007, the next will occur on 28 August 2007.
Do you know where this picture was taken? Answer next issue...

Upcoming in **PULSAR**:

I’ve done a little swap-up in the schedule to accommodate a neat article for next issue.

**2nd Quarter 2007: Impacts.**
Big or little, fast or slow, when two objects meet, there is always something interesting to see. Also, the 2nd half of the Nicaragua workshop report.

**3rd Quarter 2007: Nebula.**
Whether it blows up or squishes down, a star always ends in some way that makes for good art.

**4th Quarter 2007: Multi-star systems.**
Many star systems in the universe have multiple stars in them. In fact, there are more multi-star systems than there are single sun systems. What does yours look like?

*Pulsar* is published four times a year as part of the membership benefits from dues paid. All contents are copyright of the IAAA except where noted. Individual artists retain copyright to works contributed to this publication. Submissions may be sent to: pulsar-editor@iaaa.org

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