



Laudelina Martinez

A Career in the Arts Bloomed

on The College of New Rochelle Campus

From early childhood, Laudelina Martinez CNR SAS '63 knew she wanted to have a career connected to the arts. While studying many forms of dance and drama in her native Puerto Rico her fascination blossomed. But by the time she reached her teens, stage fright led her to rethink her aspirations.

When she first set foot on The College of New Rochelle (CNR) campus as a student, she found a haven for her love of the arts. Martinez says she felt immersed in art at CNR; her senses stirred by its impressive architecture. Even in her free time, strolling in downtown New Rochelle, she found herself discovering a new passion: art collection. "There was a shop that had a lot of African artifacts and ceramics from other artists in the area. I started collecting little sculptural pieces and that's how I began my collection."

Her fascination for all forms of the fine arts grew amidst the bonds she was forming with her fellow students who were art majors as well as the talented faculty and Ursuline Sisters whose works were displayed throughout the campus. "I was interested in their process," said Martinez. One of those classmates, Linda Montano CNR SAS '65, made a significant impression on Martinez as she sat quietly observing her woodcuts to print process. Montano, now a globally recognized performance artist, gifted her with one of those prints, a token that is still a valued treasure.

The collecting which emerged during Martinez's freshman year, would blossom into a lifelong interest in contemporary art, and has now become her full-time career at a time when most of her peers are enjoying retirement. Following her successful career devoted to higher education administration, today she is the owner and director of The Martinez Gallery, fulfilling a role that also provides a platform for many new cultural voices in the contemporary art field.

Looking back, Martinez believes she was unconsciously inspired to seize the momentum that started in the 1960s to increase representation of new artists while also becoming confident in her own eye for beauty. "People that collect at some point think on the larger issues connected, but initially it's a very personal reaction. I just knew what I liked," said Martinez.

As her gallery celebrates its 20th anniversary year, Martinez's perceptive keen eye still captures and projects a greater vision that has garnered regional and national recognition for the more than 100 exhibitions and countless additions to ongoing public education programs that celebrate the arts and culture. Her contributions to the surrounding community have expanded beyond the art world and earned a nomination from then New York State Governor David Paterson to serve on the State's Council on the Arts and a place among the 2020 honorees in Hudson Valley Magazine's Power Women Awards, celebrating 17 female entrepreneurs, executives and leaders across the region.

Martinez was a key supporter of Capital District Latinos, a nonprofit organization committed to quality of life issues and the expansion of representation for Latinos in the region, now housed in a two-year-old standalone community center. She was instrumental in bringing

the visual arts into the project. As a former president and CEO of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), she is a passionate advocate of equity in the academic voice, since her leadership led Congress to establish in law the category of Hispanic-serving institutions and federal funding that still supports them.

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As Martinez reflects on a milestone year for her gallery, she observes that it has come full circle in an odd way, having opened its doors in Troy, NY in April 2001, just months before the September 11th attacks. During the gallery's first year of operation, she quickly realized the need to revise her original rollout plan amidst a country still deeply grieving. It remains a profound lesson she draws from today as she guides the survival of her gallery in the age of the current pandemic.

"When things are not quite going as I had planned, I say to myself, 'What do we do here?'" said Martinez. Pivoting, indeed has been difficult in this year looked

upon as a seminal turning point for the art world when museums have had to shutter scheduled exhibits and small galleries have been forced to contemplate permanent closure. Martinez responded with a virtual gallery, inviting the 500 patrons from her mailing list to an online experience – welcoming the opportunity to sharpen her digital skills, share cultural beauty with others and embrace the challenges of the times we live in.

She accepts the peculiarity of raising a glass of wine on Zoom during an opening night reception instead of what would normally have been a deeply visceral delight. Adapting is part of her nature, that she directly attributes to her CNR roots. "I think that being able to think on my feet and have confidence in my intellectual ability, that is something that I really honed when I was at New Rochelle," said Martinez. It was back then as a student at an all-women college, that the spark was ignited. "We were very confident women, taught to respond to whatever situations came our way. Those are the kinds of things that an environment like ours helped to grow in you." And so, her gallery, just a 15-minute drive from Albany, soldiers on to ensure that art will endure in these trying times.

While considering the closure of her beloved alma mater, Martinez held hope for the potential that a future partnership with Mercy College could bring. "Even though I was sad, I kept thinking maybe New Rochelle might continue somehow," said Martinez. "Perhaps within Mercy, New Rochelle (alumni) could be a kind of thinktank to focus on certain ideas that were important to us while we were students."

"I am always thinking 'What if?'" Indeed, posing that question has served Laudelina Martinez well throughout her life as she plans each new amazing chapter.