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Photos by Stephanie Hutto For The Sun News

Morning coffee inspires artwork

What does it take to inspire art? A kind word from a friend can set the wheels of inspiration in motion. A chance meeting with an idol can be the impetus for creativity. But what about spilling your coffee? That's exactly what happened to Cuban artist Reynier Llanes and it's turned out to be quite the luckiest of unlucky strokes.

"It was a custom and a tradition for all of us in the family to meet early in the morning around a cup of coffee and have pleasant conversations and prepare for the day's events," said Llanes. "One day as I was drinking my coffee, I spilled a drop on one of my drawings."

From that point on, coffee became more than just a drink to be enjoyed with friends and family, evolving into a source of inspiration.

"The morning is my favorite time to paint as I am full of energy after I enjoy my espresso coffee," said Llanes, while describing one work titled "The Painter and His Brush." "I always reserve a cup of coffee that is my medium throughout the rest of my day."

This accidental discovery became a useful tool for Llanes.

"In Cuba, my art materials, like watercolors, were very limited, and I soon learned to take advantage of that accident and started to master the use of Cuban espresso coffee as an essential medium for my works on paper."

The limitations Llanes mentioned, as well as those of the Cuban government, made it hard for him to express himself fully as an artist and make a living through the art. When the opportunity presented itself in 2007, he made the trip to the United States.

Though he began using traditional painting tools upon his arrival to the United States, memories of home prompted him to return to his roots, painting with coffee on paper. Now his culturally inspired art pieces are on display at the Franklin G. Burroughs/Simeon B. Chapin Art Museum in Myrtle Beach.

The exhibit, titled "Preserving a Cultural Heritage: The Coffee Paintings of Reynier Llanes," went on display on Feb. 27 and will continue through April 28.

Patricia Goodwin, executive director of the museum, is pleased to feature the Cuban artist's work and is impressed with what he's done to get to this point.

When Llanes arrived in the United States, he made it a point to learn as much about the culture and language as quickly as possible.

"He's only been in the United States since 2007, so English as a secondary language is harder for him," said Goodwin. "He's an amazing teacher for a man 25 years old."

The work of Llanes doesn't just impress the people of the U.S., but also our neighbors to the north. Joan Hubbard of Ontario spent time with her friends observing and analyzing the various works of Llanes.

"It's lovely. It makes you feel like it's certainly a part of a community," said Hubbard. "Amazing. So expressive."

The words of Llanes, as well as the works themselves, reflect Hubbard's sentiment.

"On the island of Cuba, it is a tradition to make coffee to welcome family, friends, visitors and guests at special events," said Llanes of one work titled "The Coffee Maker."

Another painting, named "Freedom to Fly," shows more of the humanitarian within Llanes. "I always felt sorry for birds in a cage," said Llanes. "I promised if I ever found a bird caught in the bushes or entangled in a trap, I would carefully remove it and set it free."

All in all, there are 33 pieces by Llanes featured in the exhibit. Each one tells a uniquely personal story that cannot be done justice in print. So go now while you have the chance and enjoy this inspirational and culturally enlightening exhibit.

Read more: <http://www.thesunnews.com/2011/03/18/2043261/morning-coffee-inspires-artwork.html#ixzz1H0F8cuXg>