

The art of immigration

 miamiarch.org/CatholicDiocese.php

By Jim Davis - Florida Catholic



Photographer: Jim Davis

Mariana Monteagudo, from Venezuela, added her own artworks to the immigration conference March 21 at Barry University. Her doll-like faces blend global pop images with pre-Columbian culture.

MIAMI SHORES | Activists and scholars weren't the only voices at the International Immigration Conference and Arts Festival at Barry University. The March 21-23 event, true to its name, also featured several modes of art including:

- A performance by Dream, a Broward-based ensemble, half of them from Russia, half from Ukraine.
- A sung prayer in Creole by student Nicolette Raphael, with two fellow singers adding harmony.
- Three showings of a new film, Jude, commissioned by Barry's Institute of Immigration Studies. The film traces the struggle of four immigrants – Cuban, Haitian, Syrian and Honduran – to make a new life.
- Two immigration-themed art exhibitions in the university's main library: one by a Brazilian woman, one by a Venezuelan woman.

Use of the arts was a natural for Giselle Elgarresta Rios, director of the institute and a music professor at Barry. She has sung and conducted for a range of projects including the Miami Music Festival, the Greater Miami Youth Symphony, and venues in Chile, France and Italy.

The immigration institute was itself born in an artistic setting. Elgarresta Rios announced its creation in 2021, during the Miami visit of the immigration-based sculpture Angels Unawares.

“Art is a means of expression at a deep, soulful level,” said Elgarresta Rios, who was the first Cuban-American woman to conduct at Carnegie Hall in New York. “We need to see the souls of immigrants.”



Photographer: Jim Davis

"Immigrants are not a problem," Miami Herald photojournalist Carl Juste said at the immigration conference March 21 at Barry University. "Immigrants are problem solvers."

Brazilian artist Betta Santini agreed. Santini, who brought her "Roots" collection to Barry, explained that her multi-colored artworks are about innovating, yet blending in.

"We immigrants come to a new environment, a new life," Santini said in an interview. "We have to find a way to fit in, and see what we can contribute to the culture. And this is common to all immigrants."

The conferees also heard from Carl Juste, a photojournalist with The Miami Herald. Juste has won several awards for photographing Haitian refugees, the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew and other pivotal events.

"I make images that reflect you and you and you, to tell your stories," said Juste, who was born in Port-au-Prince and grew up in South Florida.

But he went further, urging his listeners to resist politicians who try to play groups against one another.

“None of us are safe if we keep yelling at each other,” he said. “Immigrants are not a problem. Immigrants are problem solvers.”