

Creative rehab



A before-and-after projection shows the extent of the conservator work. QUENTIN ROUX/SUN TIMES

Bringing damaged works of art back to life

By Quentin Roux
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In a sense, you could say Viviana Dominguez is passionate about watching paint dry.

And, she can make other people pretty passionate about it, too.

That much was evident recently at the Marco Island Center for the Arts when Dominguez riveted an audience of about 30 people with visuals and tales of her worldwide art conservation and restoration efforts.

During the presentation, she particularly concentrated on Haiti, where she has just spent more than a year commanding a team of "conservators" to restore and repair hundreds of works of art damaged or nearly destroyed in Haiti's devastating 2010 earthquake.

"Our goal was not only to rescue art, but to train Haitians to do it themselves," said Dominguez, a Marco resident who crisscrosses the world on assorted projects, and has been strongly endorsed by the Smithsonian Institution.

"We found paintings in the rubble of museums," Dominguez said, "and some of the art was recovered with the help of United Nations Japanese soldiers."

The Haitian experience, she would later blog on a conservation site, allowed her to discover the marvels of Haitian art.

"I have learned about their perspective toward life, beauty and their dreams through the paintings I have conserved, and by sharing time with the Haitian artists," she wrote. "The Haiti Cultural Recovery Project has been a transcendent experience for me."

Dominguez told her Marco audience about the painstaking processes of restoration, which sometimes meant putting sections of damaged wall murals into frame containers and later restoring the original piece by piece.

Other tasks included fixing tears and touching up ravaged



Viviana Dominguez makes her audio visual presentation at the Center for the Arts. QUENTIN ROUX/SUN TIMES



Dominguez projects before and after images of one of the bigger Haitian art restoration projects on a screen. QUENTIN ROUX/SUN TIMES



Conservator Viviana Dominguez, and Rosanne and David Hill socialize before Dominguez' presentation.

paintings, all exhibiting different properties such as materials and paints that had to be researched before recreating authenticity.

"We research the historical value, not so much the monetary but the period in question," Dominguez said. "You learn about the techniques from any particular time, apply that and then follow documenting protocol."

Dominguez trained as an artist, but was fascinated with the conservation offshoot.

"Obviously art and science and chemistry are a big part of conservation," she said. "It's a combination."

Center for the Arts President Ken Stroud said Dominguez's presentation had been both fas-



Dominguez, right rear, talks as she projects images of her work on screen. QUENTIN ROUX/SUN TIMES

inating and uplifting.

"Think about it," Stroud said. "Art is life, and you see that life being destroyed; but then you have a person with a great talent like her to bring it back to life. That's incredible."

"It blew my mind," said Joan Gerberding after Dominguez's presentation. "It's so interest-

ing to see somebody with that kind of talent, and regarded so highly by the Smithsonian. And, to have that kind of passion for what she does; it's beautiful."

Lisa Gandy was equally impressed.

"I didn't realize the restoration that can be done on something you think is completely

destroyed," she said.

Dominguez's specialties are murals and easel paintings.

She created the first university-level conservation program at the Instituto Universitario Nacional de Arte in Buenos Aires, Argentina and taught materials technology courses from 1996-2005.