

Look Who's Talking

Eugenia Marve,

Artist & Educator

by Angela Klinske

“Anytime we see a problem, it’s because we have an opportunity to make it better.”

That is how Eugenia Marve, artist and educator, accepts life’s challenges.

Born and raised in Flint, Michigan, she learned from her mother early on that she can do anything she sets her mind to. As a young girl, she discovered her love for art, aspiring to be a fashion designer and then a medical illustrator.

“I knew I wanted to do something that would help others.”

Marve, now 58, paid her way through Michigan State University as an artist, a janitor, and as a teacher’s assistant. She earned her MFA in ceramics in 1974.

Her first teaching job was in Cheboygan, a little town in northern Michigan that hadn’t yet caught on to the concept of racial diversity. She broke some racial barriers while there, learning more about herself and helping the community to be more accepting of others different from themselves.

“The emotion we shared was more important than the product we made.”

They asked her to stay but instead she came to Grand Rapids and taught art in the public schools for 31 years.

She retired earlier this year but she’s busier than ever. In conjunction with Grand Valley State University (GVSU), Marve has developed a program to address a challenge that affects urban youth. The grant-funded program is designed to increase student retention rates and achievement scores. Riverside Middle School serves as a “lab” for GVSU education majors to learn how to work in a culturally diverse environment.

Students’ parents are trained to enter the workforce, with classes in computers, resume writing and interviewing skills being offered.

In her 31-year teaching career, Marve has taught art to elementary, middle and high school students, including kids who are emotionally and physically impaired.

“It goes beyond art,” says Marve. “I needed to make a way to help young people understand how important they are . . . to help them grow and be fruitful.”

She has also taught senior citizens, former drug addicts and incarcerated men at the Kent County jail.

Critics describe her artwork – which includes clay, glass, ink and other mixed media – as surreal. She describes her work as a way to “put face” to the things that matter most to her: God, the goodness of others and being conscious of the world around her. During college, Marve studied comparative religions, which has influenced her work, and Native American, traditional Eastern and African spirituality are common themes threaded throughout her art.

Marve received the Arts in Education Award from the ArtServe Michigan Governor’s Awards for Arts & Culture this year, putting her in the company of past recipients Smokey Robinson, Aretha Franklin and Arthur Miller.

If she could tell women one thing: “Find your own selfhood and center of power – that which gives your life purpose. You don’t have to *settle* and be grateful for it.”

You can see Marve’s artwork at the UICA Holiday Artists Market on Saturday, December 2, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. UICA is located at 41 Sheldon Blvd. SE.

Visit her website at www.marvecreations.com.



Ceramic Plate
by Eugenia Marve

Marve received the Arts in Education Award from the ArtServe Michigan Governor’s Awards for Arts & Culture this year, putting her in the company of past recipients including Aretha Franklin, Smokey Robinson, and Arthur Miller.