

Couple's Latin American art at Heckscher

The collection of a lifetime

BY DEIDRE S. GREBEN
Special to Newsday

It looks like a plucked chicken," Milton Bagley says of his Woodbury home. The 90-year-old retired ad man is lamenting the many empty walls and bare spaces in the house where he and his wife, Joan, have lived for 51 years.

But this weekend, Bagley admits, he won't be surprised if he bursts into tears when he sees close to three dozen Latin American paintings and sculptures from the couple's collection unveiled in the exhibition "Rivera and Beyond" at the Heckscher Museum of Art in Huntington.

"Each piece speaks to them," curator Lisa Chalif says of the Bagleys' attraction to the deeply felt humanism linking many of the selections. The show offers the opportunity to see works by Latin American artists otherwise underrepresented in the museum's own holdings. Along with Colombian artist Fernando Botero's signature plump figures and the Surrealist and socialist-inflected compositions of Chilean-born painter Roberto Matta and Cuban Wifredo Lam, there are less-known names from all across the region.

The Bagleys' passion for collecting art began in 1978, when Joan said she didn't want "anything usual" as a gift for their silver wedding anniversary. That led Milton to wander down Madison Avenue and into an art gallery. He left with a painting by Abstract Expressionist Paul Jenkins. Joan, at the time a docent at New York's American Craft Museum, couldn't have been more pleased.

After forays into acquiring Abstract Expressionist and then more affordable American Indian pieces, they turned their attention to Latin American works. "We were traveling often to Santa Fe, and a lot of the galleries there carried modern Mexican art," Milton says of their introduction to the genre's wide-ranging styles and themes.

One of their first Latin American art purchases, a black



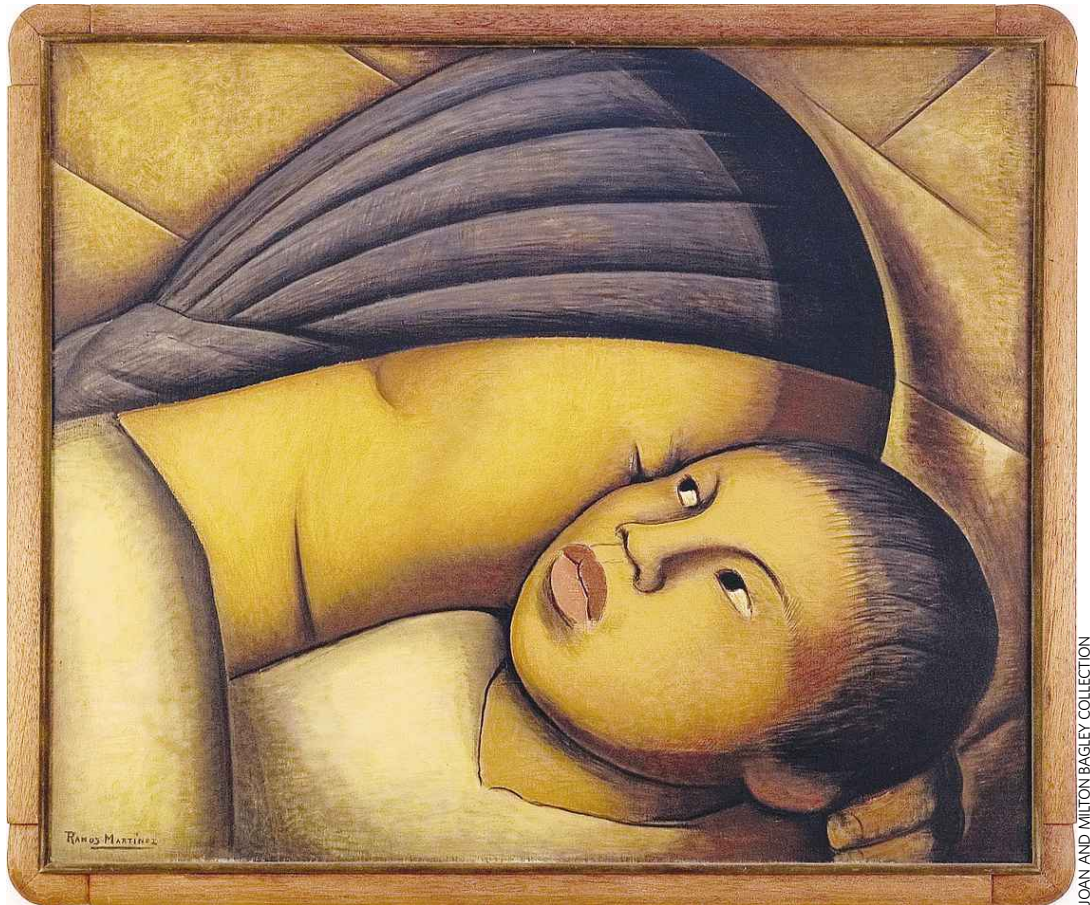
Cuban artist Alfredo Sosabravo's "Personaje con Pescado" is part of the exhibit.

WHAT "Rivera and Beyond: Latin American Art From the Joan and Milton Bagley Collection"

WHEN | WHERE 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Wednesday-Friday and 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday-Sunday, Heckscher Museum of Art, 2 Prime Ave., Huntington

INFO \$6, \$4 students and ages 62 and older, free ages 9 and younger; 631-351-3250, heckscher.org

marble sculpture of a seated woman by Francisco Zúñiga, features in the Heckscher exhibit. The Bagleys' enthusiasm for the Costa Rican-born Mexican artist, whose studio they visited, later led to a decision to splurge on a large



Mexican artist Alfredo Ramos Martínez's "Madre y Niño" is part of the Joan and Milton Bagley Collection at the Heckscher Museum.

iconic bronze. "I had to swallow hard," Milton says about the hefty price tag, "but we were going to buy it." That is, until the gallery owner told them that a man had walked in after they left and snapped it up. That man, Milton reveals, was Arnold Schwarzenegger. "I was heartbroken," he says.

They were able to track down another cast of the sculpture, which is displayed with pride in the sizable gallery space they added onto their home in 1990 to accommodate their growing acquisitions. The Bagleys' craving to collect has not dissipated. Over the past year, they added two works by Cuban artists. Along with a mixed-media, two-piece sculpture by Manuel Mendive, the

couple purchased Humberto Castro's "Mother of the Waters," a striking depiction of a woman balancing a boat with a lone rower on her outstretched limbs that is included in the Heckscher show.

In an essay in the exhibition's catalog, the couple's longtime friend and art dealer Mary-Anne Martin describes collecting as a journey of discovery, one she describes as "a little like courtship." For Milton and Joan Bagley, it has been both.

"Cavaliere (Man on Horseback)" by Colombian artist Fernando Botero.

