The enchanting Rainforest Masks of Costa Rica return to Selby Gardens for the 15th consecutive year, thanks to the continuous support of art collectors and enthusiastic admirers. Feel the vibrancy of 300 masks created by a collective of indigenous Borucan artists in a display like no other in the world. These masks allow visitors to experience the rich biodiversity of the rainforest through the eyes of the artists, who are intricately connected to their land.

The Borucan artists share a strong sense of community and consider their art as ambassador for their culture. Each one-of-a-kind mask bursts from a single log of balsa wood and comes to life through the creativity, skills, and collaboration of a designer, a carver, and a painter.

JANUARY 6-27

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MUSEUM OF BOTANY & THE ARTS
MARIE SELBY BOTANICAL GARDENS
900 SOUTH PALM AVENUE, SARASOTA • SELBY.ORG
THE STORY AND TRADITION BEHIND THE MASKS

Five hundred years ago, the Spanish came for their land and gold. They enslaved and killed thousands of natives. Tribal lore depicts how brave warriors wearing masks frightened the invaders, who thought them to be “diablitos” or little devils. Thanks to their scary masks, twelve families remained in the place now called Boruca.

More than 300 years, this proud community has been honoring their “victory” and retells their story of survival through their annual “Fiesta de los Diablitos,” which runs from December 30th to January 2nd. By the end of these four days of ceremony and celebration, the heart of every Brunka overflows with joy for the rebirth of their culture for another year. They eagerly show the world that the Brunka people and their culture live on, despite the hardships they have endured.

THE BIRTH OF THE MODERN RAINFOREST MASKS

In the 1980’s, elders from the tribe feared their younger generations were losing their cultural roots. Artist Don Ismael Gonzalez trained a group of young boys from 11-12 years old in traditional mask making. Later, some of his students were invited to the capital to study art and painting, while others remained in Boruca to attend high school. For several years, this group continued working in Ismael’s workshop, sharing their carving and new painting skills. Of those original young students, three Borucan master artists are featured in this 2019 exhibit including Bernardo Gonzalez and brothers Marcos and Francisco Rojas.

Around 1995, a client commissioned a mask featuring a macaw and a “little Indian face.” Thus, began the success of the rainforest masks depicting local flora and fauna. This has also empowered and inspired artists to keep preserving their environment and to rediscover their culture.

For the past 15 years, the Selby Gardens’ exhibits have been fertile ground for creativity to flow and for this art to reach new levels. The modern masks keep evolving thanks to new admirers and provide a beautiful cultural exchange between the Sarasota community and the Borucans.

Visit SELBY.ORG for more on rainforest masks and events.