Collection on display at Hesburgh Library, Eck Visitors Center, McKenna Hall, Morris Inn, and Main Building


Opening Lecture—November 19, 2014
7:30 p.m. | Eck Visitors Center Auditorium
“The Crèche: A Celebration of Christmas and Culture”
Rev. Johann G. Roten, S.M.,
Director of Research and Special Projects,
University of Dayton

Pilgrimage—December 7, 2014
2:30 - 4:30 p.m. | Eck Center
Begin at the Eck Visitors Center, stops at McKenna Hall and the Morris Inn, and ends at the Main Building with a reflection by Rev. John I. Jenkins, C.S.C.
In the stable at Bethlehem, heaven and earth meet. Thus, Bethlehem does not belong to the geography of space, but to the geography of the heart. And the heart of God, during the Holy Night, stooped down to the stable; the humility of God is the message of Bethlehem. If we stoop down to approach this humility, then we encounter Heaven. Then, through us, the earth, where we live, becomes a piece of heaven. With the humility of the shepherds, let us go to the Child in the stable! Let us open our hearts to God’s love made manifest in humility! Let us offer Him our poor hearts, our often selfish love, so incapable of loving and perceiving God’s love. Let us ask the Divine Child to give us each a new heart, a heart in which He can dwell and from where His love is made present to the world.

Among the many gifts we give and receive on Christmas, let us not forget the true gift: in this Child we are all children of the same Father! Accepting this Gift causes anxiety to disappear, joy to be born, and love to direct our hearts!

“Fancy to hear that Divine Babe say to you with an accent that cannot be described, while turning His eyes from you to the Blessed Virgin: ‘Here is thy Mother;’ and then, looking to His Mother: ‘Here is thy son.’ Could you hear it and live?”

~ Edward Sorin, C.S.C., January 13, 1882, Octave of the Epiphany
“Naturally Bent (Cow Horn Nativity)”
Carmen and Antonio Jerez and Carevic
Cow horn

“Naturally Bent” has a double meaning in this nativity set. Visually, the title refers to the posture of the figures in this set. Like two waves coming in from different directions, the joyful piety of the holy couple and the wise men is closing in on and literally enveloping the baby in the manger. There is a grace in their movement, and a tenderness in their respectful gesture. And there is nothing artificial about these figures; they are naturally bent. However, “naturally bent” also refers to the physical reality of the characters of this nativity. Using naturally bent cow horns, the artists transformed them into the darling figures of this set. Each culture has its own method and its own materials to represent the Nativity. Frequently, these materials are taken from the common riches of the country. But no material is worthless. In Christ’s birth, all of human reality and nature achieve new value and nobility.
Ferociously independent and intensely dedicated to the sea, to Saint Anne, and to its reputation of being the guardian of the end of the world (Finistère), Brittany, situated in the northwestern corner of France, has its own brand of Santons. Manufactured by the studio of “Roi de Bretagne” in Plougastel, the figures are entirely handcrafted and painted. Each piece bears the initials of the artisan who made it. The costumes are based on models exhibited in the “Musée départemental Breton” of Quimper. Jesus is featured in the baptismal attire of Plougastel, whereas Mary and Joseph are wearing the costumes of Point-Aven respectively, Bannalec. The couple of Guérande, called “swampers,” are collectors of salt. Johnny of Roscoff is selling onions in England. He is accompanied by his friend, the fisherman, who takes him across the channel. The ladies of Morbihan represent the human condition: they are the “chatter boxes.” The couple of Plougastel carries an apple tree laden with red apples – a promise of new life in the midst of winter, and a symbol of Christmas.
Crafted by Sukodono Mennonite Woodcarvers of Japara, Indonesia, the decorative and geometric motifs of their carvings are derived from Asmal tribal culture. Similar designs are found on houses, canoes, and totem poles. The message and expression of these figures are not in the detail or volume of their bodies but in the intensity of their gestures.
Commissioned and collected on site in the 1960s by an American librarian, these thornwood figures add a new dimension to the reality of Christ’s ongoing incarnation in the world. The great number of day-to-day activities re-enacted in this set reminds us that nothing human is left out in the message of the Incarnation. Anything and everything of good will contributes to the new world we call the Kingdom of God.

Nigeria, its northern regions in particular, has a very ancient and rich artistic tradition. In the present it has produced exquisite Christian artwork in wood, ivory, brass, bronze, clay and terra cotta. Who is not familiar with the fine arts center of Oye Ekiti, and with names of artists such as Agbana, Opa, Areogun, and Dada? Who does not remember the wooden bas-reliefs of the Gruffanti chapel and the delicately worked ornamentation of Agbana’s crèches? The Yoruba tradition has many artistic treasures
in store for those among its artists who seek to combine indigenous art and Christian iconography. There is also the popular and anonymous craftsmanship which imitates and simplifies great art. Its modest products have a mainly narrative character, multiplying artistically unassuming figures to create collective impressions and mass scenes as in this nativity set.
Togo is a small but industrious country in western Africa. This ribbon shaped country, is located between Ghana and Benin. The official language is French, but the country has a variety of local cultures. One of them is the Cabiais culture in the northern regions of Togo. This nativity was carved by Roger J. Bawi, one of the most renowned artists of the country. It was his aim to give the nativity scene some of the special flavor of the Cabiais culture. At birth, the newborn is welcomed by the whole village. Among the many representatives of the population, there is, in particular, the so-called “traditional orchestra.” It has a prominent place in this nativity set. The orchestra is composed of musicians playing the drum, the horn, the flute, a kind of rattle, and the gong. The drums, covered with animal hides, are the most important instruments. They create a festive atmosphere and harmony which, according to the artist, will entice even foreigners to join in the joyful dancing of the villagers. The horn announces the happy event of Christ’s birth, and the flute lends voice to the jubilant mood of the population. The musician who rhythmically shakes
the rattle has a special name. He is called the “griot,” a traveling poet and musician, and a herald of oral popular tradition. It is his role to welcome the baby in the names of its ancestors, and of this community with its tradition and customs. The gong player is here to round off the musical welcome. He punctuates the rhythm of the drums, and adds a lighter touch to their deep voices. African culture is known for its zest for life. Thus, this Togolese nativity is a celebration of life with its many meanings. Welcoming in joy the “giver of life,” we honor life and yearn for immortality.
One of the finest bead-and-wire artisans in Zimbabwe, Patmore was born in Chitungwiza, the city where bead and wire art originated in the early 1990s. His specialties are bead animals, cars, and motorcycles. He only recently expanded his art to include nativity sets. This may explain the visible clash between the plain and abstract nativity figures and the vivid realism of hippo, flamingo, warthog, rhino, and lemur. This setting attempts to visualize the opposition between these two worlds: a world of fright, violence, and darkness symbolized with the ferocious beauty of the animals, and the somewhat remote and removed world of hope and goodwill pictured in the solemn and peaceful simplicity of the Holy Family and the Magi. The ladder hovering in the cloud is a very old symbol of spiritual ascent and progress. It is also a bridge between good and evil, between the material and the spiritual world. Ultimately, the ladder stands for Jesus Christ himself. It is by climbing this ladder that we will attain our own good measure as Christians.
“Christmas is ... 
to remind us that we’re here for 
someone else besides ourselves.”
～ Eric Sevareid

God’s gift to us, His child lying in a manger, is offered to all peoples at all times! This is the deeper meaning of the nativity sets displayed here. They come from remote places and give evidence of the many ways in which Christ’s birth is celebrated.

Following a tradition, many families begin to set up their crèches during the novena leading up to Christmas. The manger, however, remains empty until the Holy Night. This custom can be a simple yet effective way of evangelization. It gives witness of a living faith that is passed on to children and all who visit this home. We may also be familiar with the “Posada” (house, dwelling, inn) in Hispanic countries or the European “Shelter Seeking.” Both traditions—unlike the innkeeper—offer Mary and Joseph a home where Baby Jesus can be born. Is there a concrete way for my family to make room for a family in need?

Saint John, in his Gospel, went to the heart of the matter, giving added depth to Saint Luke’s brief account of the situation in Bethlehem: “He came to his own home, and his own people received him not” (Jn 1:11). We can apply this to ourselves: Do we have time and space for God? Can He enter into our lives? Does He find room in us, or have we occupied all the available space in our thoughts, our actions, and our lives for ourselves?

Having found the Child with Mary, His Mother, and fallen down to adore Him, let us pause awhile in Their holy presence, forgetting the world with its noise and perfidies, and opening our only treasure—our heart—let us make Him our richest offering, our whole being, that He may dispose of it as He pleases! He came from heaven for nothing else.

～ Edward Sorin, C.S.C., Epiphany 1877
An area famous for all types of woodcarving, the Zhejiang province is the home of the only Christian woodcarvers’ workshop in China. This Nativity scene was designed by a Chinese Christian man who wants to remain anonymous. A generous nativity set, it has an impressive number of figures and trees. In Chinese nativities, human figures tend to be of modest size but are beautifully carved. All figures related to nature, like animals and trees, are given more sizeable proportions. Indeed, nature is dominant, the mother and teacher of the human race.

As in many other cultures, trees were the object of veneration in ancient China. It was in the shadow of the Pipal tree (*ficus religiosa*) that Gautama Buddha received his divine illumination. The tree became a symbol of the “great awakening.” Manger and cross in Christian tradition and legend have been assimilated with Incarnation and Redemption, but it is Jesus Christ himself who is the tree of life.
In France nativity figures go by the name of santons after the famous santons of Provence. Thus, the santons of Alsace (P. Delorme) and the santons of Brittany (Roi de Bretagne) are well known. A popular name for small and cheap statues of saints in the beginning (1850-1900), these “little saints” or santons are the guardians of at least one small corner of the French soul: its charming, gregarious, and joyful nature. In Quimper (Brittany), one of the citadels of French faience creations, they achieve a special patrician look thanks to their intense colored glazes: the white, yellow, and blue colors of the magi, and the greens for the shepherds. Only Mary and Joseph, no doubt to single out their humble station, are clad in colors of grayish green. The Christ Child matches the kingly visitors in regal blue, white, and yellow.
Ivory Coast
“To the Farthest Ends”
Katiola artisans
Clay, chalk

The wealth of African nativity sets cannot be summarized in this one set from the Ivory Coast. In Africa, there exist many nativity scenes of different styles, frequently carved in wood or made from brass and soapstone. This set is from clay and painted with chalk. It has an ornamental beauty. Its sober lines and square volumes are reminiscent of contemporary art; the intricate and colorful design of the dresses is a hymn to life as only African culture may conceive it. The magi bring gifts, as they would, but they are outdone by a group of impressive women carrying on their heads heavy loads for the Child. The representation of the Child is remarkable as he lies or stands with outstretched arms within the open petals of a rose. There exists a longstanding symbolic relationship between Christ and the rose. He is the center of life and love.
Nativity sets made of olive wood are widely known. They represent one of two crèche traditions originating in Christian Palestine. The other tradition adopted fabric for its Nativity creations. If the wooden carved figures reflect the solemn character of Orientalist art, we discover a more genuinely native aura among the Nativity actors and actresses made of fabric. Colorful yet unpretentious, they suggest joy of life amid simplicity and hardship. This Nativity set brings to life memories of sun and dust, the fragrances of the marketplace and the excited shouts of merchants. Most important, this Christmas scene wants to be a festive hymn of welcome to the newborn. But somehow the impression lingers that joy is but a moment, and that its bright intensity mercifully hides the long haul ahead, a trying journey through the valley of tears.
Although the Peruvian Andes Mountains are some of the most rugged in the world, many small villages can be found in their high valleys and plateaus. The men of these villages farm the level areas and raise what livestock they can on the slopes of the mountains, while the women, in their spare time, make handicraft items. In this manner, they barely eke out a living. It is only through the sale of the handicrafts that they earn money to buy the modern goods which they need. These handicrafts reflect beliefs and lifestyles, drawn from a mixture of folk tales and religion, for their themes. Once, possibly twice a year, they come down from the mountains with their goods packed on the backs of their llamas, in order to sell them at various markets and fairs. (There are no roads in the Andes—only narrow foot trails which require the services of pack animals.) This trip may take over a month to complete.
In the “Land of the Thousand Hills” nature is frugal and cattle predominate. And, so, at one time, Rwanda was owned by shepherds and farmers. This nativity set was made in praise of shepherding. Tall and slim, the figures are people on the move, some carrying long staffs, one of them with the little shepherd’s hut on his left shoulder. Proud nomads and marchers, these shepherds are never servile, and their respectful pose is a gesture of noble devotion. One posture, one attitude, this gesture of noble devotion is common to all of the figures, wisemen and Holy Family alike. Movement is suspended for a moment only, the time of the shepherds’ feast. In no time they will be on the move again, carrying in their hearts the joy of a moment.
Advent and Christmas can awaken profound, often emotional, memories! During this season of short days and extended darkness, our sentiments are interwoven with hope and expectation. There reigns a dual impulse: some may remember the ‘never-ending’ weeks of waiting for the Christ Child of our childhood. These are memories of sheer goodness contrasted by the faithlessness and carelessness around us. It is up to us to succumb to the consumerist pull or to take advantage of this sacred time to nourish anew our personal relationship with God. Christ’s birth reminds us that God took the initiative by revealing and giving himself to each one of us. The helpless child in the manger is waiting to be loved by you and me in return!

The Argentinian crèche highlights the Holy Family in search of shelter. When God knocked at the door of their young lives, they welcomed him with faith and generous love. Will you do the same?

“Imagine when kneeling enraptured before the Crib, to see the Blessed Mother offering you the Divine Child to hold in your arms for awhile, as she did to some favorite saints; the marvel would be, as it always was to my mind, how such a favor could be borne and not burst instantly the poor human heart.”

~ Edward Sorin, C.S.C., January 13, 1882, Octave of the Epiphany
Attentive observation suggests that representations of the Nativity follow two typical movements. There are nativity sets where all the characters move forward and gather around the manger. A different and more recent tradition reverses the movement and sends the Holy Family in search of the world and of people. In this set we see the Holy Family in open space, limited only by a distant horizon separating water and sky. We don’t know where their boat—made from leather—will take them. The sheer limitless space seems like an unfair challenge for the humble couple and their child. But there lingers a confident joy on their faces. The mission is engaged. It must continue. This set is reminiscent of a different boat ride and a different river. This representation of the flight to Egypt has the Holy Family riding the river Nile. The banks of the river are infested with wild animals, lions, and dragons. Threatening at first, they will eventually follow the Holy Family, subdued and subservient. And thus, again and again, the message of Christmas travels the world.
The Eastern icon has roots in Coptic art. Hailed as a link between Pharaonic, Greco-Roman, and Islamic art, Coptic art seeks beauty in simplicity. What is meant is both the simplicity of idea and form. The idea centers on what is essential. Form lends color and body to make the essential present and visible. But what is essential? It is the age-old celebration of God’s revelation in Incarnation and Redemption. Here lies the challenge of Coptic art and all Eastern iconography: to make visible in humble and simple form the beauty of divine presence and beauty. Its program consists of maximum meaning in minimal form. The abstract design of this nativity set created by turning each piece of wood on a lathe is reminiscent in some way of the very spirit of Coptic art.
From the mountains of Chalatenango close to Honduras, these tiny figures in sparkling black, red and green tell the story of upland living. Though sparse and harsh, life is a constant reminder that grandeur and riches are from above. Llort’s figures speak the common sense of humility, the language of the little ones.
Bombastic and superficial, some of contemporary Christmas culture irks and annoys adult taste. A possible reaction is illustrated in this Romanesque nativity. Retrieving the art of medieval bas-reliefs and sculpted capitals, the Sisters of Bethlehem offer a Christmas world of peaceful interiority and serene contemplation.
This majestic nativity representation from Singapore was made by a Buddhist family. The medium used is paste from the bark of the cinnamon tree, called *pâte d’encens*. The tiny but bustling island state of Singapore, formerly a part of Malaysia, is situated at the crossroad of many cultures. This nativity set reflects the influence of East and West. The baroque style of posture and vestments suggest a Latin origin, possibly Portugal or Spain. The facial expressions convey some of the mysterious gravity of Asian religious traditions. The figures are light and fragile. Their brittle existence is in stark contrast with their imposing stance and proud bearing. Gathered at the manger, the kings are but fragile majesties.
Carved from black wood or Mpingo, this Maconde (Tanzanian) nativity set is a gift of Daniel E. Pilarczyk, Archbishop Emeritus of Cincinnati, to the Marian Library. The heavy and shining figures are a worthy tribute to the art of the Maconde. Its style has evolved from simple and rustic patterns to highly decorative elements and sophisticated symbolism. The art of the Maconde follows at least two important criteria:

1. A piece of art is, by definition, an original that cannot be copied.
2. Art is a form of story-telling. Each work of art has a narrative value.

These seem the perfect criteria to recreate the uniqueness of the greatest story ever told.
How fitting for Notre Dame’s (Morris) Inn to welcome and provide room for the Holy Family! The Nativity sets displayed here have come a long way; just as many of Notre Dame’s students, faculty, and staff. Christmas reminds us that no matter where we are, “God comes” to visit his people, to dwell in our midst and live with us in a communion of love and life: a family!

Like the Holy Family who celebrated the First Christmas away from home, many from this campus and beyond may find themselves among strangers. They may face problems of relating to and communicating with a culture very different from their own. Yet, even if “we’ll be home for Christmas,” we still experience an inexplicable longing for peace and harmony, for permanent love and shelter… a form of homesickness for the Eternal Holy Night. Then we will truly be at home!

O WONDER!

“And yet, when I turn from the Crib to the Tabernacle and the Communion Table, I understand, I realize that I am favored above all the privileged visitors of the Stable of Bethlehem. Bethlehem, indeed, was the beginning of the manifestation of God’s love for man; the Last Supper in the Cenacle was the crowning of that infinite love of God for me. Once in their lives, the Shepherds and the Magi beheld Him in the Manger; but I, every day, or every other day, I, poor sinner, receive Him, not in my arms, but … in my very heart … O wonder! The very angels adore Him in my heart. How shall I thank Thee?”

~ Edward Sorin, C.S.C., Octave of the Epiphany, January 13, 1882
These figures from Jesús de Machaca (Bolivia) are affectionately called “Tilinchos,” meaning “small” in Aymara, the local language. Though dressed in the colorful costumes of the Aymara culture, their one characteristic feature is their eyes. Wider than heaven and darker than amber, they are an ever-moving kaleidoscope of frank curiosity and bottomless wonder—a true child’s delight of conquering the world.
Puzzled by the prosaic and ordinary simplicity of the first Christmas, adult generosity seeks to enhance the original with added elegance and riches. Fernand Py’s figures have the noble profile of Gothic art enriched with a touch of ornamental magic. In elevated station like the kings, or huddled around the manger, the actors of this scene are a tribute to elegant piety.
MADAGASCAR
“A Matter of Survival”
Zafimaniry artisan
Rosewood (Vandriaka)

This nativity set has been carved by Malagasy artisans belonging to the tribe of the Zafimaniry, and living in Ambositra on the island of Madagascar. The wood used comes from a non-hardwood tree called Vandriaka. Zafimaniry people are known for the decorative carvings of the doors and windows of their homes. Begun as a conservation measure by Catholic missionaries in the 1960s, the Zafimaniry were prompted in the craft of figure carving as a means of saving the lushly forested areas of their habitat, while assisting the people to find sources of income. These smooth, shiny, and beautifully carved figures are a tribute, not only to the artistic abilities of the Zafimaniry, but also to their will for economic and cultural survival. So much in life is a matter of survival! The message of Christmas is no exception.
**MEXICO**

“Hymn of Creation”

José Tomás Esparza León

Painted terra cotta

This set reflects one of many styles of Mexican *nacimientos*. It comes from Tonalá (Talisco). Its figures are rounded and sturdy, providing the painter with much surface to demonstrate his skills. Influenced by pre-Christian indigenous culture, the personages are covered in front and back with artful ornaments, luxuriant flora and mythic animals. This hymn of creation, showing fish and fowl, rabbits and deer, is also a hymn to life and its manifold plenty. The figures, representatives of life in its various forms, are gathered respectfully around the very source of life, the Christ child. In contrast with life as it should be, exuberant and plentiful, the setting is humble and sober. It conveys the frequent opposition between material poverty and the riches of the soul, or, life as it could and should be and its fallen present reality.
Popular art has a tendency to stylize its objects, and to empty them of individual traits. The result is frequently one of harmonious uniformity favoring color and ornamental motifs. This applies to the art of the Ndebele artisans. They are renowned for their use of lustrous glazes and hand-fired raku. The recurring flower motif is like a logo for life.
In the classical dance drama of Thailand, Thosaganyh, the
demon king, is defeated by Rama, the young hero. These figures
in their scintillating armor are symbols of old and new, good and
evil, of culture of death and culture of life. In sum, they picture
human drama in the midst of which a promise of lasting peace is
born. And so they all rally around new hope. We see the Chinese
Mandarin, the prince of India, and the Thai nobleman, musician
and fruit vendor; Meo man and Meo woman representing the hill
tribes; the Karen man carrying firewood and the farmer woman
a fruit basket. It is up to prince and princess to lead the whole
group in a new dance, one of joy and peaceful victory.
At the heart of every Crèche is the divine Child. He, like all children, needs a mother’s care! The all-powerful makes Himself powerless, dependent on mother and father. The world’s Redeemer did not come with power and outward glory. He comes as a vulnerable baby, asking for our love instead of ruling over us. In this small, helpless child we discover God’s sovereignty! He loves us so much that He offers Himself to us as a Gift! He, who is beyond space and time, has entered time for us as a little babe! Let us be touched by this mystery!

The Christ Child directs our gaze towards all of God’s children who suffer and are abused in the world, the born and the unborn; the physically, mentally, and emotionally challenged; the imprisoned and lonely; the un- and under-employed; the elderly and dying. Every child of God asks for our love.

During this holy season, let us think especially of orphans—those children who are denied the love of parents. Let us pray to the Child of Bethlehem that His love may enfold all these children and that we may know our part in respecting life in all its stages.

“The month of the Holy Infancy brings us in close contact with the Crib; Bethlehem is becoming daily more and more a delightful rendezvous to our faithful souls—a House of Bread in which every want of our eager and panting hearts is satisfied. Each time we approach it, in silence and in faith, we find in it the Divine Babe lying in the Manger, stretching out to us his loving little hands, soliciting our love and, as it were, saying with an accent of heavenly sweetness which none can resist: ‘Amen, I say to you, unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. ’ Here is what fastens us to the mysterious Crib.”

~ Edward Sorin, C.S.C., Octave of the Epiphany, January 13, 1882

“We are better throughout the year for having, in spirit, become a child again at Christmas-time.”

~ Laura Ingalls Wilder
The figures of this set, made of Lifaki wood, are of exquisite beauty, not least because of the physical beauty of African men and women. The polished smoothness of the wood and the careful attention given to detail lend these figures a heightened expression of physical presence and realism. Here we have an example of successful inculturation where cultural form meets Gospel message, enhancing the spiritual meaning of the Nativity scene.
Well, not all three camels are flying. But the one who is, perched high above the others, seems to thoroughly enjoy it. The sumptuous robes of the master and magus lend wings to his endeavor. Using his artfully twisted head and neck as rudder, he seeks out the winds of providence which will take both camel and rider to safe port. Speaking about safe port, have a look at him who is our port of salvation. Doesn’t he look cute on his bed of pink flowers, legs elegantly crossed and arms extended in a noble gesture of universal invitation? For once, the adjective cute seems to apply, not only to the representation of the Christ child but to the whole set. All these figures are pretty, dainty and sweet. There is more, however. These personages exude an aura of seasoned wisdom and saintly shrewdness, so much so that even the sheep seem to know what this commotion is all about. At first glance, baby Jesus and his whole company may look like the highly elaborate sugar-coating on an expensive wedding cake. A closer look reveals that these figures of hardened bread dough, intricately decorated and robed with glistening veneer, play a role not unlike Egyptian art. All flat and frontal, they have no life of their own. Their whole purpose is to show and tell the story.
FRANCE

“Guardians of the Savior”
Marie Arbel
Plaster

This nativity set was created by Marie Arbel, a French liturgical artist. It bears the marks of the mid-twentieth century reawakening of sacred art. The simple lines and classical forms of the figures reflect a downright departure from the sentimental art of St. Sulpice. They signal at the same time a new spiritual realism and openness to the stylistic canons of contemporary art. The calm stability of the various characters, ox and ass in particular, amply justifies the title of “Guardians of the Savior.”
In the French tradition of Provence, the Holy Family comes to the village, and only then will the people gather around the manger. Provençal Santons — the so-called “little saints” — are most gregarious. And when Christmas comes, the whole village from the mayor to the village jester is mobilized. Without exception! Even the Gypsy woman with tambourine and brightly colored clothes is part of the cortege. Now, have you ever seen a congregation of Frenchmen and women that does not engage in some lively discussion and dispute? And so this nativity scene could have been called “The Dispute.” From the running commentary by the farmer on the left looking at you — to the two women engrossed in conversation on the right, the whole scene is bristling with a mixture of curiosity and enthusiasm. Not even Joseph escapes the quizzing of Professor Boniface. Meanwhile, Mary holds silent watch, and the “Bousque-tiero,” the woman with the bundle of wood, delivers her modest gift.
Take a look at the magpie in the pine tree. Korean people say that a welcome guest comes when a magpie sings. Jesus Christ seems to be a most welcome guest in this small straw-roofed house where the poorer folk once lived. He wears a typical Korean outfit for a male child, including a Bokgun (Korean cloth hat for boys). Mary, as a married woman, does her hair up in a chignon and wears a simple garment of subdued color. Joseph, a married man himself, wears his hair in a topknot, and dons a simple light blue outfit. Traditionally, men and women wear Chogoris (Korean-style jackets); women’s Chogoris are shorter than those of men.

Young and old welcome the presence of Baby Jesus. Youth is represented twice: by a village girl, respectfully bowing before the infant, and dressed in a brightly colored, blue and red Han Bok (Korean costume). As a maiden girl she wears her hair in braids. The young and kneeling villager, with braids and in a colorful
costume, throws his arms up in joy. Also kneeling and greeting the future redeemer with a more measured gesture of respect is the old villager, his hair bound in a topknot. He is clothed in an outfit of subdued colors.

The rural setting of the Korean nativity, made of Dackjongie (Korean paper), is further marked by the smaller structure representing the barn, and the traditional jar stands where the soy sauce jars are placed. Koreans kept in these jars Gochujang (the thick soy paste mixed with red pepper), Duenjang (soybean paste), Ghanjang (soy sauce), and Kimchi (Korean Cabbage pickles).
The artist of this set is from Tonala in the state of Jalisco (Mexico). He has won Mexico’s presidential award for his art, and this nativity set was awarded first prize in the 1996 International Crèche contest in Bellingham, Washington. Esparza makes his nativity sets using pre-Columbian techniques inherited from his ancestors. The clay is dug from the hillsides near his town, and the dyes are all natural materials. The distinctive features of this set are the lively and varied design elements, mainly floral and animal figures interspersed with geometric ornaments. The ornamental figures are the real reason for this nativity set. Christmas rose, peacock or rabbit: they all proclaim, in so many voices, the wonders of life.
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<td>Indonesia</td>
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<td>Ivory Coast</td>
<td>Eck Visitors Center</td>
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