



*Untitled Painting by Noreen Graf*

#### SURFACE TREATMENT

What: "2019 Members Open Exhibition"  
Where: Kika de la Garza Fine Arts Center, 921 E 12<sup>th</sup> Street, Mission  
When: Oct 12-Nov 1, 2019  
Hours: 10am to 6pm Tuesday to Friday, 10am-2pm Saturday  
Contact: (956) 583-2787 or [www.uppervalleyartleague.org](http://www.uppervalleyartleague.org)  
Free and open to the public. Call to confirm.

#### **An upbeat take-away**

This member's show offers work that leaves visitors feeling good.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

Once again, the UVAL Member's Exhibition offers surprises. This was an open call exhibition for members, but even with the restrictive perimeter of membership, the large roster guaranteed a range of abilities and ideas. Some categories like traditional art and watercolors were expected, but the balance is tipping this year. Not so many watercolors and just a few of the usual photographs are shown. Both of these art forms have their own member's show, so those makers along with fiber artists are probably focusing on those upcoming events. There are a few ceramic-sculptures, clay jewelry shows up in the form of small pendants, and there are

engaging ceramics. Generally, this exhibition was dominated by painters and the general take-away was upbeat.

About those surprises – some of these are unexpected moments of mood-lifting wit. Berry Fritz's "Apple Time" depicts the quiet dignity typical of Fritz's still-life oils, but close inspection reveals a tromp l'oeil newspaper crossword puzzle with the answer, "apple", and a technically brilliant hand-scribbled recipe for applesauce.

Noreen Graf's "Mona Lisa" is a parody that puts a smile on every viewer's face. Graf's version, true to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is constructed from sliced-up cards and logos instead of oil paints; She replaces Leonardo's imagined natural landscape with a landscape imagining modern structures and incorporates a tiny image of the Eiffel tower and even the expired UTPA bronc, the whole bordered in Starbucks logos. Graf is an interesting artist to watch, and she also has an acrylic life-size portrait (self?) of a woman and her two children. The subject is classic, but Graf presents the figures in a free-standing cut-out version that we have seen used for esteemed celebrities. Why shouldn't mothers be as esteemed? Graf's command of the painted surface combined with her ability to capture subtle emotions go beyond the format and make this concept work.

Chris Leonard's ceramics mix humor and sudden disconcerting thoughts. His small platter, "Bob's Your Uncle", whose gloss glaze, gold rim, and excellent design maintain his recognized style, suggest a story about a curious person. Laura Gomez shows several works, but the most intriguing is her painting, "Kissing Lips". Quite large and placed upon watercolor ink-blot-style images, the kiss itself represents a blot. Gomez has defined the lips into an evocative pattern where one is tempted to become a Rorschach-blot subject and perceive its unintended images.

Several works document the natural world, some exquisite, some not so much. Dennis Grover's "Honey Bee" is a delightful watercolor and is a perfect expression of the insect's dedication. The play between the sharply realistic treatment of the bee and the transitioning clarity of loosely defined foliage epitomizes the bee's intensity of focus.

While there are many excellent works on display, some UVAL artists are still in the moment of artistic discovery and produce unrelated works in different forms, media, subjects, and themes. One member has several works in encaustic, encompassing both realism and abstraction, and the craftsmanship is enough for viewers to connect the work. But another member who went from realism to abstraction in four or five paintings without a common thread only confused us. Repeated commonality within works reveals an artististic identity. When there is no commonality, a maker is not ready to be called an artist.

This "Open Exhibition" is enjoyable, so be prepared timewise.

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