



Cenizo in Gold

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: Ancient Wisdom: Paintings by Jessica Monroe
Where: Lobby Gallery, McAllen Public Library, Nolana at 23rd Street
When: March 11-May 25, 2018
Public reception for the artist, April 22, 2018
Hours: 9am-9pm Monday-Thursday, 9am-6pm Friday-Saturday, 1-9pm Sunday
Contact: (956) 681-3000

Call of the Natural World

This exhibit is a plea to enhance our awareness of the fragile native environment.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

An activist on behalf of the local ecosystem, Jessica Monroe continues her portrayal of native Valley plants and wildlife in her exhibition, "Ancient Wisdom", at the McAllen Public Library. Like her previous "Art Ecologic" exhibition, this series includes paintings denoting relationships between specific subjects, such as "Bearing Fruit", depicting the relationship between a hummingbird and the blossoms upon which it feeds, as well as other birds and butterflies. Monroe has an on-the-scene interest in native species of the Rio Grande Valley and, through her art, takes us on an excursion into the hidden corners of this environment. The collection acts as a single installation to enhance our knowledge of the natural habitat and its denizens. A conservationist at heart, Monroe documents native plants and wildlife that may be in danger due to climate change and habitat loss. Explaining her attraction to nature as an artistic subject, Monroe posited, "Nature is an important subject now because we are drastically losing habitat and species, and when we learn about it, we can easily make a difference. The bird populations are plummeting; I am preserving and informing." There are plenty of statistics about declining numbers of many species worldwide, and it has been documented that we only have 3% of our native Valley habitat left. Monroe is making an

attempt to preserve this percentage through her art – showing us what native habitat looks like, and often, where to still find it.

With a technique that has become Monroe's signature style, many of these paintings leave the unpainted linen canvas as background, corresponding harmoniously with the natural imagery. Her paintings also communicate the care she has for her subjects. Looking closely at her brush treatment in "Curved Bill Thrasher", each feather seems softly caressed by her brush stroke; the deep orange eye blazes with life against blue-gray feathers. Her treatment of small clusters of foliage is equally impressive, as in "Cenizo in Gold". Here, as in other paintings depicting small blossoms or leafy scenarios, repetitious plant parts are indefatigably presented, describing the characteristic beauty of the plant. Blurred background strokes dance around edges in her imagery as though the wind was trying to intrude.

An interesting cluster of several small works on the far wall initially resemble a Library display rather than part of the exhibition. They are Monroe's inspirations and studies from the field. She explained that pieces in this group were taken from locations where she walked and explored; there are seeds that she collected hanging alongside watercolor and pastel images that were done on the walks. "They're grouped together," she said, "because the complexity of grouping makes it difficult to pick out an individual artwork on its own, making the arrangement reflective of the experience of being outdoors." For Monroe, being in the natural world always offers a lot to see. "You have to take it all in then hone in on one little thing, then another. Then you can explore and see the relationship between the two things," she continued. "That's part of the natural experience."

The reception for "Ancient Wisdom" is scheduled for Sunday, April 22, celebrating Earth Day. Monroe would like to see certain habitats re-established in our yards, continuing the sustenance for our native and migrating species.

Nancy Moyer, Professor Emerita of Art, UTRGV, is an art critic for The Monitor. She may be reached at nmoyer@rgv.rr.com