



Burnt Offering by Linda Lewis

SURFACE TREATMENT

While the COVID-19 situation is keeping the galleries closed, we will keep your art experiences alive by looking back at memorable shows/reviews, as well as offering some new and special online exhibitions. Today we revisit a major IMAS regional exhibition from 2011.

Texas Biennial: TX-11

A significant exhibition, this show is an extension of the larger Texas Biennial that features important Texas artists.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

IMAS has mounted a very elegant exhibition. Dominated by wall pieces, “Arte de la Frontera” was conceived as an extension of Austin’s Texas Biennial Exhibition, “TX-11.” And is shown in association with the central exhibition. There are at least sixty venues around the state showcasing what is considered to be the best art in each region with “Arte de la Frontera” representing the Rio Grande Valley. Juried/curated by Joseph Bravo, Executive Director of IMAS, and Tom Matthews, Assistant Chair of STC’s VAM Program, “Arte de la Frontera” includes works by twenty-one artists from Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy counties.

“We have brought in a collection of work that represents the most important work done in this area over the last two years,” explained Bravo. “The art of the Rio Grande Valley reflects the confluence of cultures that coexists uniquely in this region. Virtually all the art on display in some way confronts the issues of hybridity, cultural appropriation, negotiated identity, and a preoccupation with dualism.” Complex ideas are embedded in every work in the show, often making the task of comprehending the artist’s personal agenda or concept difficult. There are no statements of artistic intent available for the gallery viewer.

A stunning work by Karen F. Sanders, "Press to Enter," superimposes graphic elements over the achromatic photograph of a wall. As an African American woman, she comments on the inverted relationship between inclusion and exclusion. Who belongs and who doesn't? The graphics add an element of obfuscation, but combined with the photograph create a powerful image of symbolic meaning and beauty.

George Lorio's "Crossing: The Game" symbolically references the border and the journey of those who cross it in search of hope. His format is a large tic-tac-toe game indicating success based on strategy and outwitting your opponent. Lorio's technical style is ingenious; the grid and game pieces are carved wood with their surfaces expressing the feeling of the watery, unstable crossing. In the exhibition layout, there is a winner.

Border violence was a concern of several artists. With his "Guardian of Hell," David Freeman's sculpture stands out for its conceptual inspiration and wit; he satirizes the competition trophy. His trophy is a splendidly garish trophy of terror, mock honoring the violence associated with the narcotics trade. A collaborative installation, "Sans Serif," by Thomas Murray and Donna Mason Sweigart, speaks not only of contemporary jewelry and drawing, but of fractured identities referencing the beheadings that have become commonplace in Northern Mexico. Linda Lewis comments on violence with a more universal reference by repurposing an actual bible. Recognizing that the Bible frequently refers to making sacrifices, "Burnt Offering" is her own burnt offering to atone for the sins of the people who sacrifice the weak and the innocent for their own gain and dream up complex rituals to somehow justify that horror.

"This was an excellent opportunity for us to highlight the new, exciting contemporary visual art talent our region has to offer," said Matthews. "Each artist is responding to the world around them and producing artwork that ultimately is a reflection of them as much as it is a commentary on their social and cultural surroundings." And some artists do perceive a calmer and less frightening view of the world around them than others. "Arte de la Frontera" is a beautiful exhibition that provokes and provides many levels of reflection.

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