



Cake Box with Cake

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: “Deceptively Delicious” by Alexis M Ramos
Where: STC Mid-Valley Campus Library Art Gallery, 400 N. Border, Weslaco
When: June 3 – August 9, 2019
Hours: 7am-9:30pm Mon-Thurs, 8am-7pm Friday
Info: 956) 872-3488

Grand Illusions

Culinary and ceramic techniques combine forces to create illusions of beautiful pastries.
BY NANCY MOYER
SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

“Deceptively Delicious” is a 3-dimensional trompe l’oeil. It is a feat of technical virtuosity mobilized into an illusion of excess. At the STC Mid-Valley Campus Library Art Gallery, Alexis Ramos tricks the eye by creating the illusion of important pastries served in a beguiling mixed media installation. Made from clay and glass, these works reference classic epicurean-styled desserts, displayed with platters, plates, cups, and vessels to reflect an important occasion. All the pastry sculptures are placed on special tables and the individual pieces quickly give way to the overall installation, welcoming the visitor to a world of delicious implications. “The wood pedestals/tables were designed for this series,” exclaimed Ramos “They’re 100% reclaimed maple. My aim is to fool both the eye and stomach in hopes to have the viewer salivating at these deliciously deceptive delicacies.” The specially constructed tables and glass chandeliers suggest an elite ambiance.

Ramos' personal affinity for the technique and discipline in pastry design inspired her to attend culinary school in pursuit of Wilton cake piping techniques, and when her piped cakes took on sculptural attributes, she transferred to studio art to further her sculptural skills. She spent two years exploring clay slips in order to create illusions of cakes with frosting. Calcite slips that had the viscosity to hold a form were ultimately able to mimic the choppy strokes of applied frosting, and a Majolica glaze that reflects like glass and captures the visual texture of frosting is the basis of the shiny surface seen on the red cake. The slip-frostings were applied during the construction of the clay pieces, and then completed in a single earthenware firing. She also demonstrates a background in glass with cast-glass gelatins, but there are some pieces so ingenious that it's difficult to actually determine their exact medium. By ultimately fusing traditional cake decorating techniques with ceramic sculpture and glass, Ramos has created stunning illusions.

For the cake series, there was a desire to explore the relationship developed with food in the Latino culture - how it is used to convey love, sadness, and celebrate special occasions. "Food is a time for family and sharing," she professed. "There is no greater joy than seeing that pink pastry box for the first time." And the manifestation of her pastry vision is truly glorious. But there is a flip side: it also exists as a vision of excess. As often happens with art, this installation has acquired its own voice which exceeds the artist's intention. Fitting the mood of the show, references are made to pastries originating during the French Rococo period, which is historically remembered for its material and decorative excesses. The Rococo ended badly. And the excess of sweet foods depicted in this exhibit will also end badly for those seduced by the enticement of gastronomic pleasure. This country is currently struggling with health problems for those who yield. Ramos says that her work can bring awareness to the pandemic affecting South Texas and the health-related complications that can arise from the abuse of a social relationship with food, but there is nothing in the art works that informs of a problem, only the attraction is celebrated. Ramos does not create unpleasant illusions.

"Deceptively Delicious" envisions foods that, unrestrained, may bring happiness, but also harbor regret. "Deceptively Delicious" provides many layers of considerations, all of them worth pursuing.

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