



Mother and Child by Emilio Villalba

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: "Departures"
Where: eob PROJECTS, Suite 109A, The Courtyard complex, 5401 N. 10th Street, McAllen
When: January 2019
Hours: 12-5pm Mon-Sat

Angst and Unrest

A new gallery space offers art lovers serious fare

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

Dr. Esteban Brown returns to the McAllen art scene with a sophisticated new gallery, eob PROJECTS. Tucked into a corner of The Courtyard in north McAllen, eob Projects is a contemporary art space that, at present, defies a projected definition. The inaugural exhibition, "Departures", feature works by four artists who expose angst and unrest from different reference points. The paintings of Rigoberto A. Gonzalez dominate the space, while paintings by Emilio Villalba, photographs by Max Cervantes, and sculpture by Richard Hyslin complete the experience. An upscale space with respected artists, this exhibition raises the bar for McAllen art events. The hanging spaces allow tight concentration on the art works; the high ceiling allows viewers' perceptions to soar. A rear space provides opportunities to view large scale works or for hosting talks and presentations. For "Departures", this area has ample seating for viewing Gonzalez' impressively large mural, "Balacera en Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico".

Gonzalez' ten works are driven by the social landscape and its unrest. Some early paintings beginning in 2004 depict family interiors, but it's his paintings of the border drug cartel violence that quickly take over. Some of these works have appeared in group exhibitions but uniting

them here forces the impact of their message, and quotes are posted along with title labels providing sharp insights into each work. With his dramatic chiaroscuro style, Gonzalez unfolds the darkness of humanity. Even the single landscape, “La Ribera del Diablo”, showing the Mexican side of the Rio Grande, is called the Devil’s Riverside due to the deaths with which it is associated – “where heaven and hell are said to be very close together”. Gonzalez embraces the Baroque style of Caravaggio to infuse his subjects with theatrical ethos; Villalba paints contemporary representations inspired by masterworks of the past. Gonzalez visualizes the outer drama as subject while Villalba goes for the drama within, pulling the angst of modern stress into view. “With these pieces,” stated Villalba, “I wanted to explore a kind of omnipresent pressure I think we all live under. One that grows out of the clash between humanity - our unique mess of emotions, obsessions and urges - and society’s prescription for success. I’ve always been fascinated by the mess.” His “Mother and Child” shows a mother with duplicated facial features looking away from the child. The child void seems to exist only to exemplify their disconnection.

Hyslin’s sculptures greet visitors through the gallery’s plate-glass window. Two “In and Out” abstract wood pieces flank a smaller red sculpture. Like the Villalba paintings, “in and Out” considers interiors simultaneously with exteriors, but with less overt emotion. Constructed of scrap wood, they epitomize exposure to life’s hardships, yet holding it all together. Cervantes’ photographs are brilliant departures from the typical photographic portrait. The images were carefully crumpled and re-photographed, ultimately presented in the shape of the careful crumple. Influenced by the paintings of Lucien Freud whose paintings suggest lapses of time and manipulated gestures, Cervantes explained, “I have attempted to perform the same manipulation by physically distorting portraits.” His subjects include those with whom he has had a personal relationship, and he wants to communicate to the viewer his experience with them in a personal space over time. The three “Ralph” photographs suggest a strange time lapse as we see the face changing from an expression of confusion to non-existence as it folds in on itself.

Dr. Brown intends to present projects from local artists in this space. Taking a creative and contemporary approach to the arts, he is open to interesting curatorial possibilities. “I have no specific direction at this time; let’s see how it goes,” he concluded, “Working with art is so enjoyable.”

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