



Tonto Platform #349 by Maxine McClendon

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: "Dreamscapes"
Where: Performing Arts Center Exhibit Hall, UTRGV campus, Edinburg
When: Fall 2019 - February 7, 2020
Hours: Campus hours
Contact: 956 665-3480
Free to the public

Landscape x 3

Honoring the late Nichols family, this exhibition is a celebration of their artistic relationship with the land.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

"Dreamscapes" commemorates the art of the late E.E. Nichols family. This fascinating tribute to E.E. Nichols, Professor Emeritus of Art from UTPA; his wife, Maxine McClendon; and their son; Christopher Nichols, presents works in watercolor, acrylic, and trapunto that fill the spacious Performing Arts Center entry hall at UTRGV, continuing down both side hallways and even up the central stairway. A selection from a half century of art production, "Dreamscapes" focuses on a shared attraction to the landscape and the differing perceptions of each artist regarding its characteristics and personal meaning.

The love of landscape reverberates here, but what it offers the artist varies greatly among the trio. Christopher Nichols saw the landscape as factual reality; E.E. Nichols felt the spirituality of nature and imagined what might be there. McClendon perceived the natural world as shapes that slide from a natural reality into the world of abstraction. Ultimately, her work may be read as real places or just shapes.

In the acrylics and watercolors of E.E. Nichols, the landscape is a spiritual space that can house the spirit, whatever it may be. His works speak of unseen life in spaces that could otherwise be defined as open. A small untitled watercolor exemplifies this aesthetic; an empty park with

subdued colors captures the spiritual feeling that drifts through its trees. "Grovescape with Figures" provides images of some of these spirits, where small photographs of Greek and Virgin Mary sculptures are placed within rows of orange trees, infusing the space with spirits of art and religion that inhabit favorite places.

Eschewing the embedded spiritual rapport, McClendon saw the landscape from far above, where life becomes objective. As result of air travel, she became fascinated with seeing distant edges of land abutting waterways, the jagged outlines of eroded landscapes forming beautiful and unexpected shapes. With a background in fibers, she used a trapunto technique with canvas to recreate the shorelines and emulate the macro-view of land far below.

"Piped Creek, Grand Canyon #353" uses coloration to clearly separate water and land. The four panels read as topography with the padded land areas rising from the flat sea-line gradually, as though actual water had licked away their edges. Her large trapuntos serve as public works with major corporations and hotel chains, such as ITC in New York City and the United Bank of Switzerland. They were also collected by the Museum of Fine Arts in Santa Fe.

Christopher Nichols was the most traditional of the three in his artistic leanings. Having learned drawing and watercolor from his father, he was attracted to landscapes and waterways as places where things were. His "Boats at Evening Dock" is a crisply realistic picture of boats and their structures. By contrast, E.E. Nichols boat scene, "Los Ebanos", becomes a moment of color-filled gaiety and excitement as the ferry appears between two trees, somewhere between reality and magic.

Exchanges of Influences are interesting to observe. E.E. Nichols use of watercolor and acrylic techniques reappear as part of the large trapunto panels. It is also worth noting that E.E. Nichol's seen-from-above grovescapes appeared after McClendon's padded canvases extolled the landscape from the sky.

McClendon and Christopher Nichols did not receive the exhibition exposure here in the Valley that E.E. Nichols received from being part of the UTPA art faculty, making this exhibition an excellent opportunity to remedy that disparity. Parking in the visitors' lot west of the Performing Arts complex will provide reasonable access to "Dreamscapes".

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