



Does it Bite or Does it Sting?

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: "Feared & Revered" by Angela Fox
Where: STC VAM Art Gallery, Bldg. B-103, Pecan Street campus
When: February 25 – April 4, 2019
Hours: 8am-3pm Tues., Wed., Thurs.
Reception April 4, 6-8pm, public invited
Contact: artgallery@southtexascolleg.edu

Social Interactions

Brilliantly hued and thought-provoking paintings show us conflict and unity within the human situation.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

"Feared & Revered" by San Antonio artist, Angela Fox, is a fascinating exhibition initially evoking a folk-art sensibility. But consuming this imagery instills a heavy aftertaste of intellectual and socially relevant meaning. Investigating group dynamics and social fabrics, her brilliantly hued works in gouache begin a narrative depicting a secure world for a close-knit gang of friends who are shown in a variety of activities and then morphs into pain and betrayal. With a background in printmaking, Fox's painting brings to life flattened shapes with characters and backgrounds comprised of crisp dynamic patterns. The show includes the neighborhood scenes, sisterhood commentaries, achromatic Micron drawings, and in some works, the mask is used as a motif to reveal deeper archetypal sensibilities. Currently on display at the STC Art

Gallery, "Feared & Revered" is ultimately about how we interact and exist with each other, masks and all.

Fox has stated, "My work depicts narratives that focus on the preservation of communities and how collectivity presides over individuality". This unifying concept flows through the exhibition. Neighborhood friendships initiate her narrative against backdrops of dynamically patterned literal and figurative walls and buildings. Meant to symbolize security and unity among her tightly knit gangs of characters, they can also be read as barriers addressing the complex world in which we now find ourselves. In these paintings, characters get together wearing cocoon-like, protective shells of layered garments that represent mutual support and signify membership while obscuring identity. This is most notable in the painting, "Eat My Dust", a human stack that speaks of empowerment through social confidence as figures support each other on an unlikely ride. In other scenes, "The gangs hang out and drink beer while gathering supplies," added Fox, "slaying serpents, and establishing camps—embarking on adventures of survival, creation, and destruction." These characteristics are often represented in Fox's works by serpentine imagery whose symbolic meaning can shift depending on the situation. Historically, the snake is both feared and revered. In ancient Greek art, it exemplified the notion that polarities can co-exist, and conflicting energies can be reconciled; this one creature embodies the extremes of aggression and protection, destruction and healing, death and renewal. Confronting the complexities of human relationships, a pair of masks in "The Lovers" rest on serpentine symbolism. Snakes flow from the lover's eyes, intertwining in an internal, but perhaps tenuous, bond. Snakes occur in Fox's works as an ongoing thematic device. A brilliant commentary on gender duality occurs in "Does it Bite or Does it Sting?" in which a nude female wearing boots stands in front of a rainbow emanating from a Greek urn. The rainbow mimics the shape of her serpentine hair while a polychromatic scorpion is nigh. And in "Seeing Red", a stressed out mask/face, sports serpentine tresses. In its dual nature, these tresses could represent feminine protection or possible doom. It is the responsibility of the wearer.

Symbolic fire appears in feminine imagery as a reflection of their passion, and passion itself becomes the message in the drawing, "She Burns". Here, a sisterhood community is connected with passion, individualized by snake sensibilities and bound by gender behind a fearful mask. Or is it simply the betrayal of a beloved hiding behind the mask?

Most of the works in this exhibition are intimate in scale. The exceptionally adroit and beautifully painted textures and details are revealed only at close viewing range making "Feared and Revered" a very personal experience.

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