



Dogs Eat Everything by Benji Heu

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: **“Continued Directions. Variable Connections: Benji Heu & Ron Fondaw”**
Where: STC Library Art Galleries, Bldgs. F, 3201 W Pecan Blvd
When: through August 8, 2018
Hours: 7am-9:30pm Mon-Thurs, 8am-7pm Friday
Info: 956) 872-3488

Thoughts and Feelings

The artworks in this show focus on developing states, human and otherwise.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

“Continued Directions. Variable Connections: Benji Heu & Ron Fondaw”, at STC’s Library Gallery, offers contrasting thoughts and directs us on a path through humanism into the realm of science. The ceramics, along with a few drawings and a mixed media piece incorporating painting, are informed from very different sources, yet bound together with their earthy materials. Heu’s works question unspoken thoughts and feelings from the pre-verbal mind and are bound closely to a figurative/portrait concept, while Fondaw finds inspiration in the materials themselves, allowing them to transport him into the geology and physics of time itself. For the viewer, his works are abstract.

Depicting animals and rounded childlike faces embellished with drawn and bas-relief images, Heu’s ceramics explore the feelings of non-verbal minds - their environment, their thoughts or whatever is impacting that person or animal. He establishes more than just an artistic head with his ceramics. Initially delightful, there is a slightly eerie quality about them; their often-small glass eyes momentarily shift their presence from being inanimate art objects into something that dwells on the borderline of sentient existence. The idea of rounded faces started when Heu had children and spent several years looking at the face of a baby and a toddler, easily becoming fascinated with observing the baby’s face before it could speak, reading emotions and looking deep into luminous eyes. “I can’t get over it,” he exclaimed. “I love babies. I love

the large baby eyes because they're very piercing." One of his ceramic faces sports albino deer eyes. "I think eyes are a pivotal point in someone's features," he commented, "I love that intimate focal point in these pieces."

While Heu muses about the workings and manifestations of mental ephemera, Fondaw strays away from humanity. Going for the Big Picture, he is fascinated by acts of creation, all the way from quantum reformations of atoms to the forces that formed the earth. His mixed media work, "Lashes", combines painting with thrown and sliced ceramics. In this work, Fondaw was inspired by the CERN collider that splits and merges atoms and particles creating hybrid energies. Combined with the belief that the circle is a symbol of holistic infinity, he has used arcing circles and slices of movement within circles to suggest a notion of creative wholeness. Like particle activity, some elements merge and others don't that expresses a physical tension that also manifests among sentient beings. This is a surprisingly effective analogy of particle physics. His abstract clay wall pieces, made with slate slabs, are metaphorical recreations of geological forces. Fondaw describes slate as clay that's gone a few hundred thousand years in compression, picking up a lot of carbon along the way. He kiln-fires it, causing the slate to puff up and release eons of carbon bubbles in the kiln, forming an unusual ceramic surface. Aesthetically, he compares contrasts of unlike materials to collage theory - bringing disparate things together. Referring to "Fired Slate #4", Fondaw describes it as an amalgam of porcelain, Egyptian paste, and clay, demonstrating his interest in the unpredictable firing processes of combinations of unlike objects and clays; "To me," he professed, "contrast is one of the primary platforms in good art."

Both artists project an excitement of discovery in their work, and Fondaw neatly defines the feeling with his statement, "I'm most excited when the clay is delivered to the studio, all the possibilities that could be are in it now. And once you make something, it's finite."

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