



*Adam and Eve* by Cate White

## SURFACE TREATMENT

What: "Hasta Que Te Conoci"  
Where: eob PROJECTS, Suite 109A in the Courtyard complex, 5401 N. 10<sup>th</sup> Street, McAllen  
When: currently on display  
Hours: 1-8pm Mon.-Sat.

### **Malaise and Unrest**

Two San Francisco painters explore personal and social issues with this exhibition

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

The emotional rawness of this exhibition is initially unnerving. We have become accustomed to art works being carefully processed before their public consumption, but this art is raw. I don't mean unfinished; these artists are masters of their mode. "Hasta Que Te Conoci" by San Francisco artists, Cate White and Gina M Contreras, at eob PROJECTS lays open the sensibilities of the artists as they toss repressive barriers from their emotional psyches. Distinctly different approaches to paint effectively communicate their personal views.

Severe discontent with status-quo is evident. Contreras stays personal, obsessing with a romantic breakup and loss of sexual intimacy, while White grapples with racism, neo-colonialism/Capitalism, and her mother's psychological state.

Stylistically, Contreras implies control of her situation with precise gouache applications of line and flat color, giving these paintings a graphic-narrative quality, both literally and figuratively. They bare the damaged psyche of the artist ruminating alone in her room about the broken relationships that she holds onto and can't seem to give up. What makes these pictures raw is

their overt vulnerability – self-depictions of the artist’s nude overweight body wistfully recalling past relationships through visions of erect male sexual organs and sketches. “In these tiny spaces,” she said, referring to the rooms in which she has lived, “I spend my time contemplating the past and creating something new.” Contreras’ malaise is hers alone and she gives us an objective and subjective tension between the neatly painted images with their orderly boundaries, and the power of her emotional unrest ignoring the limitations.

White reveals her discontent and obsessions with brash, slashing strokes of oil and acrylic on canvas or hurriedly-cut papers. “I paint to address suffering,” she declares, “particularly the suffering of the tension between power and love as it plays out in culture and in our psyches.” Feeling a deep heartbreak over the separation of races in America, and as a white artist living in a black community, she often crosses identity lines in her art. She wants to avoid creating works that unwittingly promote a neo-colonialism identity. “One Real Body” shows a nude woman kneeling, trying to shield her racial identities; one hand tries to cover her African mask-like face, the other, her Caucasian body. White believes that our contemporary idea of “identity” is a neo-colonial habit that serves a social hierarchy of cultural privileges, determining who issues orders and who obeys them. In her art, White wants to move past this notion and seek balance, but she sometimes overlays too many ideas and confuses her focus.

In “Adam and Eve” a man offers a bedded woman romance in one hand and pain and consequences in the other, shifting the biblical guilt of original sin. However, it could also swing racially in a negative direction. Another painting addresses pain regarding the artist’s birth. “Birthday Mother, Birthday Baby” is about White’s birth; its creation helped her digest its trauma. She "accidentally" painted the umbilical cord coming out of the mother's navel, and later realized that she was also representing the hurting mother as the hurting baby she had been. The baby is painted on a separate canvas representing a continuation of physical and emotional separation. Brutally painted, It’s a painful image.

In the midst of this exhibit’s pain and suffering, there are moments of quiet beauty. White’s “Take it Easy” offers as vision of pure relaxation as an arm begins to sink into the wallpaper upon which it lays.

Because nude imagery comprises all of Contreras’ works and most of White’s, publication policies restrict their inclusion with this review. Visit “Hasta Que Te Conoci” to further consider the artistry of these protocol-challenged works.

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