



Javalina

SURFACE TREATMENT

With COVID-19 slowing gallery openings, we will keep your art experiences alive by looking back at some memorable shows/reviews. Today we revisit Ken Little's repurposed masterpieces from IMAS, January 2015.

The Elements of Progress: Dreams Escape

Solo Exhibit by Ken Little

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

San Antonio sculptor, Ken Little, repurposes found objects to create works that are imaginative, sometimes biographical, and packed with ideas. His exhibit at IMAS, "The Elements of Progress: Dreams Escape", is currently on display in the museum's Clark Gallery. The show includes Little's repurposed objects such as taxidermy heads, leather shoes and other leather goods, as well as bronze sculptures, references to public art pieces, neon, and drawing.

Entering the gallery raises questions; why are all those shoes stuck to those animals? And are those real dollar bills on the soaring suit? Beginning with a question is not just for the viewer of these fascinating artworks, but also for the artist himself.

"I start more with a question than a statement," Little said. "I really want to do something that I've never thought of before, and that I couldn't have thought of before, so I try to put myself into situations with things and let some kind of magic happen." His sculptures document a dialogue with his quest.

The sculptures of repurposed shoes/leather on animal armatures intrigued me the most. The artist appropriates the imagery that the leather objects bring with them and then transforms them into something else. "They are symbolic in that I am recycling the leather back to the animals," stated Little. "I also think of them as scenarios about life because there's a man's shoe, a woman's shoe, a child's shoe, and they're all interacting doing different things. They're like dancing footsteps, but there's these collisions - these intersections of things that happen

in our lives. That's sort of what it's like to me; the history of the leather and the shoes shows up in the pieces." The artist's construction of these intersections is deliberate, witty, and masterful. A belt makes a sinewy path across the body of "Javelina", its buckle becoming an eye; a textured glove becomes a leg. A force seems to have magnetically attracted the return of these objects to an image of origin without bothering to change its commercially transformed shape.

The paper maché animal sculptures are seen by Little as ruminations on the human condition. "I want these pieces to be about me," he explained. "For instance, that guy, "Panhandle", has his foot in the middle of Amarillo; he's stepping out of it. That's where I was born and raised." Typically, Little's animals embody a sense of memory, melancholy, and loss.

Another theme that has concerned this artist involves masks and costumes, the way that we present ourselves to be who we are. Referencing the business suit as the basic uniform of capitalism, the large trousers sculpture, "EL," is paper machéd with real dollar bills. "The dollar bill is an interesting thing," commented Little. "This fluid, abstract system of capitalistic faith based on these little pictures on these pieces of paper really intrigued me." "EI" omits all the functional and feeling parts of the occupant, symbolizing the spiritual and intellectual emptiness of the material world. Little used 400 dollar bills on the trousers, explaining that it cost less to use the actual bills than it would have cost to bronze-cast the piece.

"News," a bronze mask whose mind lies on a pile of coins is chained to a hippopotamus-of-consumerism mask. It's about his father's reaction upon hearing that his son had decided to become an artist. This will resonate with many other artists.

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