



*Athlete at Rest* by Berry Fritz

## SURFACE TREATMENT

What: "Life Drawing" Exhibition  
Where: Kika de la Garza Fine Arts Center, 921 E 12<sup>th</sup> Street, Mission  
When: Through Oct 6, 2018  
Hours: 10am to 6pm Tuesday to Friday, 2-5pm Saturday  
Contact: (956) 583-2787  
Free and open to the public

### **Art offers Reassurance**

Figure studies by the Upper Valley Art League life drawing classes express a passive serenity.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

Is the centuries old practice of life drawing still viable in today's dynamic world of novelty and electronics? Well, it turns out to be "yes, it is." The "Life Drawing" exhibition, a collection of nude figure studies at the Kika de la Garza Fine Arts Center offers a reassuring look at the study of the human form. Coordinated by Thomas Murray, the exhibit features drawings and a few paintings produced directly and indirectly from UVAL's life drawing classes, which Murray oversees. "I don't teach as much as I facilitate," he explained. "It's a process, a situation, we draw when we're in the moment." He said the idea of having an exhibition came as quite a surprise. "We're happy meeting every Saturday having coffee and donuts, drawing, and going on our way at the end," he added, "So putting together an exhibition of works that were not intended to be exhibited was really quite personal." The works on paper fill the gallery, their spontaneous rhythm broken occasionally by a few paintings that were subsequently done from the class experiences. Novices as well as established artists enjoy the weekly opportunity to

hone their drawing skills with the classic nude model, and several of the artists are quickly recognizable. The painting, "Back Light", by Berry Fritz, grew out of a drawing also on display. Drawings by Fritz and Murray tend to stand out by sheer number and quality, followed closely by Alicia Miner's iPad Pro drawings.

Murray believes that drawing the human figure is one of the most challenging subjects, formally, socially, and politically. The process forces the artist to shift brain waves and to see, rather than to mechanically remember, the differing shapes of the human form. The upshot of this practice increases fine muscle coordination as well as visual development, allowing expanded observation and interaction with our environment. Portraying people has had a bumpy history in the art world. When figure painting took a dive in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Andy Warhol, one of the people reputedly responsible for killing the genre, helped found the New York Academy of Art in order to salvage the kind of technical fine arts training (most notably figure drawing) that seemed in danger of becoming extinct. "I see a lot of women artists who are painting and drawing women as well as men," Murray exclaimed. "Women taking a subject that has been predominately male dominated is interesting; most often, women have been the subjects of men's art work. So, it's a highly political subject when we draw the figure; I try to even out the number of males to female models as best I can." This exhibition is definitely dominated by the female form and Fritz's graphite and colored pencil drawing of a male model, "Athlete at Rest", is a quietly beautiful respite.

For a good while we have been awash with "significant" art, often obscure in its message, and photographs of everything we've never seen. But every day the news of the world feels more like a pulpy political thriller with an unhinged plotline. Some artists have responded by grounding their work in familiar non-eventful human reality. It suggests that, in a time of chaos, there could be nothing more necessary than simply reinforcing ordinary life. For many of us, the simple image of the uncluttered human figure seems the most stable and socially reassuring of subjects.

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