



Indulgence of Fatal Beauty

SURFACE TREATMENT

With COVID-19 rebounding and slowing gallery openings, we will keep your art experiences alive by looking back at some more memorable shows/reviews and providing some new online exhibitions. Today we revisit "Machistas y Vanidad" by Brownsville Artist Noel Palmenez, exhibited at South Texas College in 2013.

Machistas y Vanidad

This exhibition speaks of the fallacies of negative cultural habits with sensitivity and artistic virtuosity.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

"Machistas y Vanidad" is about the culmination of one's exterior," stated Brownsville artist, Noel Palmenez, "how we wish to perceive ourselves and what we desire. The Machistas' greatest weakness is the belief that they know it all and their fear to ask a question or admit that they are wrong. It is pride that keeps many men from living a more fulfilled life; it is the fear of change." Currently on display at STC's Library Gallery downstairs, this is an impressive exhibit consisting of paintings, drawings, prints, and mixed media works, all flowing in perfect unity due to the artist's tight philosophical point of view and the technical virtuosity with which he creates his images.

Half the works focus on feminine vanity and half on the male fallacy of machismo. "it's

the masculine identity of many Latino men," explained Palmenez, "they are left behind holding onto old traditions and beliefs. The Machistas never show emotions but rather a façade of strength and toughness. "Machistas y Vanidad" speaks of the evolution of this negative tradition into something positive and hopeful," offered Dawn Haughey, Gallery Associate. "It is a message that needs to be heard." Palmenez depicts men wearing old broken clocks, signifying time that doesn't work - a timeless attitude that is broken. The most ambitious work on this theme is the large oil painting, "Pecados del Padre." An older man relying on walking canes carries out of date concepts on his back. The sins of the father are identified as old politics, street martyrs, a masked drug fighter, and glorified death. He also wears an old worn clock. The image, although technically beautiful, is repulsive. The man burdened with these ideas is indeed a cripple.

Feminine vanity seems somewhat more complex to the artist, and not all of his images reside in the hopelessness of false culture/custom. Feminine vanity may also be perceived as a right of freedom if managed properly. Palmenez chooses to view it as a great freedom and a way for women to express their identity and fearlessness. Beetles and earth creatures are combined with images of women, showing that although embellished, they are also grounded. Sometimes we forget that we too are from the earth and we are all capable of deep and sacred wisdom. "The Strength of Symbols" shows a young, heavily tattooed woman wearing seven beetles. The beauty of this work is hypnotic, a quality that occurs frequently in this exhibit.

The pencil drawing, "Desires of Mortality," takes on the traditional shallowness of surface beauty - the admonishment that beauty is only skin deep. Palmenez does it so well that he seems to make us aware of it for the first time. Here, a woman is depicted wearing a magnificent lace collar, her beautiful head lifted to expose the mechanical controls within.

"Enduring Women and Customs of Tibet" captures the image of a woman tightly contained by her rich garment, heavy jewelry, and elaborate hairstyle. She is immovable in the center of the canvas; a background web strengthens this position. Like the male machista, her movements are blocked by the customs she embraces/externalizes.

Palmenez demonstrates a notable sense of observation of nature, which along with his technical capability to extract the essential qualities are, yes, breathtaking. My memory resonates with his depiction of hummingbirds in the painting, "To Find Beauty Within." And his color pencil technique has a place on my Wow! list.

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