



At the Tower of Pisa

## SURFACE TREATMENT

What: Miriam Smith Art Exhibit  
Where: McA2 Creative Incubator, 601 N. Main Street  
When: The month of August  
Hours: 9am-5pm, Monday through Saturday  
Contact: Laura Robles at 956-687-2787  
Entrance to the Incubator is free to the public.

### **Conserving Form and Beauty**

This exhibit of traditional paintings and porcelains offers a conservative art experience for the August visitor.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

Miriam Smith has a passion for conserving techniques and styles of art. Her new exhibition at the McA2 Creative Incubator Gallery encourages us to see the quiet beauty of past aesthetics as they fit into a contemporary setting. Paintings hung against the brick wall suggest a private and comfortable location, and her porcelains are displayed on pedestals in the center of the gallery. All are easily imagined as existing in one's home. Of course, that's what the Incubator is about – developing the creative passion into finished products that will have a place in the world. Although Smith's exhibits are usually about her painted porcelains, her oil paintings dominate this showing; the small

central pedestal grouping displays only a few painted porcelain pieces. With the exception of an abstract work and a large metaphorical work at the entrance, Smith's imagery is literal and easily referenced by subject. Titles were not there when I reviewed this show and my references are of a descriptive nature.

These works are generally traditional in genre and include landscapes, scenic architectural views, floral representations, and even animals. The variety of subjects attest to Smith's broad interests at home and abroad, as we see the tower of Pisa carefully rendered against a partially clouded sky; in the foreground, a woman in a white hat seems to have more interest in a flock of birds. Smith's direct technical style reflects 17<sup>th</sup> century Northern European aesthetics with its sharp illusions of reality. Her "Blue Jar" and "Green Jar" paintings embrace the importance of everyday objects, and as follows that tradition, the ceramic objects and fruit are centered brightly against the darkened tonal space. Dutch still-life paintings often suggest the hopelessness of mortality, but Smith finds a balance with hers. Her still-life paintings combine objects that resist the passage of time with objects that are vulnerable to its cosmic clock. They offer a mixed message with grapes and peaches bursting with a full but limited life experience pressing against the unlimited endurance of glass-coated vitrified clay vessels. The synthesized images speak of strength and health, and her large flower paintings revel solely in the fullness of life.

The beautiful and charming painting of a young native girl crouching with goats slides into kitsch with its sweetness. But once again, we find an interesting balance occurring. The kitsch aspect parallels a deeper perception of a girl whose sheep are in control of her life. The sheep press in against the girl, as though she were a member of the herd. Judging by her clothing, they have provided a good life for her and as she cares for them, she is one with them.

Smith is part of the International Porcelain Artists and Teacher Incorporation, and the few porcelain pieces in the show attest to her background in that skill. A seventeen-year veteran of porcelain painting, Smith teaches classes in this disappearing form at the Incubator. A unique art form, it was popular 2,000 years ago in China, came to this country 150 years ago, but may now be on the brink of extinction. These works further call attention to Smith's respect of historic styles, with Victorian flavors revealed in shapes and motifs. Her Pitcher is bold, with its layered primary hues enhancing the porcelain shape; a leafy berry-vine motif meanders and unifies the distinctive layers. With her studio at the Incubator, visitors may stop by and see other of Smith's works, both paintings and porcelains.

*Nancy Moyer, Professor Emerita of Art, UTRGV, is an art critic for The Monitor. She may be reached at [nmoyer@rgv.rr.com](mailto:nmoyer@rgv.rr.com)*