



San Pedro el Botellero

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: "Pentimento: Sabbatical Research Exhibit" by Pedro Perez
Where: STC Library Art Galleries, Bldg. F, 3201 W Pecan Blvd
When: August 27-October 3, 2019
Hours: 7am-9:30pm Mon-Thurs, 8am-7pm Friday
Info: (956) 872-3488

Saints and Others

Pedro Perez updates images of saints, martyrs, and even deities with 21st century images.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

STC art faculty member, Pedro Perez, imagines images of saints, martyrs, and deities with a contemporary twist. His sabbatical research exhibit, "Pentimento", currently on display at the Library Art Gallery, transforms portraits of friends into modern day saints by slipping them into the visual iconography traditionally used to depict images of Catholic saints.

During his sabbatical in 2017, he immersed himself in Renaissance and Baroque art in Italy, France, and Spain, and studied the patronage of the Church and wealthy families who supported the art. The Christian imagery that was developed at that time fed Perez' vision; portraits of wealthy patrons made their way into biblical depictions, while faces of friends and professional models became the faces of religious figures whose actual appearance could only be assumed. Clothing, rather than reflecting the era of the subject, was usually contemporary to the time and place of the artist, allowing a closer relationship between the subject and the believer. Perez' paintings follow that practice.

For me, the most engaging image is that of "San Pedro el Botellero". An exception to historical dogma, San Pedro is, in fact, a homeless man who lives frugally in Puerto Rico, the artist's homeland. "While all the other people represented in the exhibition remind me of a particular

saint,” explained Perez, “he is his own saint. He has achieved his sanctity by being humble and poor.” Placed asymmetrically on the canvas, the vibrant blue of San Pedro’s shirt and the golden ochre of his halo speak of the strength of the spirit within. Perez’ painting is crisp in its depiction, and San Pedro’s modest demeanor emits kindness.

The paintings have a nuanced balance of illusionism and color field conceits; the contemporary realism style is well suited for this theme and instills a formal tension and drama to the compositions. An interesting colorist, the artist often lets neutralized clothing and backgrounds counter the robustly warm colors in the skin tones, while “Benedict the Moor” flips the concept by contrasting mortal life against a metaphysically yellow ground.

Perez gives us a surprise update with “Saint Francis of Assisi” - the saint is depicted in the feminine gender. Still, there are traditional references to the birds and wolf legends; her glance is upward, and she holds a dog. Quite another meaning could be given to this defender of animals. The dog is a chihuahua with fresh tags. Should we also see the saint in the contemporary image of animal rescue?

Members of the Trinity have not escaped Perez. “Jesus” is aligned to common image depictions, while “Deus” takes us somewhere else. Perez’ “Jesus” has the appearance of a Hollywood star. The information tag tells us that the conventional image of a fully bearded Jesus with long hair emerged around 300AD but did not become established until centuries later, and ever after, images of Jesus have shown ethnic characteristics similar to those of the culture in which the image was created. An image worthy of our celebrity culture seems appropriate. The painting, “Deus”, projects a sense of acute attention, but the description of Deus/God posted by the painting is confusing by comparison. It reads: “God is most often held to be incorporeal or immaterial and related to conceptions of transcendence, being outside of nature.” This “Deus”, definitely a stern flesh and blood male father-figure is akin to Michelangelo’s portrayal in the Sistine Chapel and may now lead us further into the idea of Humanism. It has been asserted that scientific advancement has ushered in a time where mankind has become God. Do we no longer need a Transcendental Being for guidance? Is humankind now able to be its own God?

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