



*Fractures I* by Benjamin McVey

### SURFACE TREATMENT

What: "Re/Search: Alcantar, McVey, and Willome"  
Where: North American Art Gallery, 417 N, 17<sup>th</sup> Street, McAllen  
When: Currently on display  
Hours: By appointment  
Contact: (210) 744-6253

### **Investigations of Thought**

This work presents explorations of philosophies that build self and social awareness

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

"Re/Search" is a three-person show featuring works by San Antonio artists, David Alcantar, Benjamin McVey, and Jason Willome; it is currently on display at David Freeman's North American Art Gallery. Appearing to be a simple exhibition with sculpture, painting, and drawing, it represents three very complex artists who tend to deal with a myriad of ideas and possibilities. This is a show where a drawing appears to have its aesthetic cards on the table, yet lurking behind every image is a deeply investigated or researched social, psychological, or physiological springboard. This trio shares a concern for research-based art. "That for us this is the reason for making art in the first place," explained Alcantar. "We use the research of our individual ideas as the foundation for making the objects."

The opening reception included performance art and kinetics along with the traditional forms. The exhibit itself is a mind-shift of contrasts stretching from commissioned art on the spot to art for art's sake standing by, and a popular style versus work inspired by intellectual posits. A critical omission in this particular exhibition is the posting of artists' statements, which could have enhanced the viewers' appreciation levels.

Overtly blending art and business, Alcantar's performance with tattoo art became the literal yet ephemeral negotiation between the artist and the customer. "Skin in the Game", as Alcantar refers to this project, involved research into social resonations between art and tattoos, perceiving that many people who visit the museums and galleries are a tattoo target audience. "They're buying tattoos in a significant amount," he said. "When they see a \$200 photograph or a \$500 drawing, they seem unwilling to spend that money on that; they feel a more personal relationship with a tattoo." Using the language of business, several watercolor charts statistically depict this preference. A watercolor painting of a segmented shark gives a nod to the "art as business" aesthetic of Damian Hirst.

McVey and Willome present difficulties in that their art does not readily display the ideas that made it. Both artists look for big picture inspirations outside their own experiences and find them, but the actual works often articulate the language of art/medium. McVey's drawings are beautiful and dramatic, and he also shows small sculptures, whose expressive power pales under the power of his drawings. However, his large plank piece about negotiating life emits social and psychological strength. His concern with boundaries is informed by people, architectural spaces, and the voids in between. The drawings eloquently speak the language of drawing, positive-negative space and implied line. "Fractures 1", inspired by the World Trade Center tragedy, is a masterful melding of smoke and structure through organic and geometric shapes. The chaos is smoke - the unpredictability of it. Willome says he thinks about scale: physiological, sociological, and psychological. "The world that we emerge from is a place that's very much alive," he exclaimed. Philosopher Alan Watts' analogy that an apple grows out of an apple tree the same way we grow out of the universe informed Willome's work, "Accretion (An Apple Tree Apples)". His mixed medium "Accretion" works grew out of this concept of interlocking scales. "Accretion (you are who you love not who loves you)" references the contrail of the Challenger space shuttle with the idea of our relationship to the cosmos. "I made these contrails of rockets, shuttles up into space, of Epson salt," he said, "because of the formal similarities between the crystal structure and the clouds made by the contrails. Watts said that minerals - like salt - are a primitive form of consciousness." We are all connected.

"Re/Search" is excellent and the effort should be made to see it.

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