



Marjo the Magical Pig

SURFACE TREATMENT

With COVID-19 rebounding and slowing gallery openings, we will keep your art experiences alive by looking back at some more memorable and possibly still relevant exhibition reviews. Today we remember a 2011 social protest exhibition from New York artist, Ron English.

You are Not Here

Super-sized vinyl prints satirizing American pop culture make this a lively and entertaining experience.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

American culture as a circus sideshow? Most definitely, according to Pop Surrealist artist Ron English. This provocative exhibition features large-scale works including ten large digital prints on vinyl and three super-sized prints. English is a social satirist exposing realities behind appearances. His amazing truth-packed exhibition, "You Are Not Here", is currently on exhibition at IMAS.

The core of the exhibition is based on the premise of the circus sideshow; sensational images make outrageous promises about the spectacle that awaits the visitor. English sees modern advertising practices often relating closely to circus freak-show come-ons using the metaphor of 20th century carnival shows to describe the often-surreal nature of the American Pop culture experience. "Mouse Mask Murphy" presents society as a pop culture lab rat, depending on scientists to save him from the consequences of his own choices.

In the central Clark Gallery area, a digital graphic novel offers "Ron English's Propaganda Issue 1", taking on fast food and epitomized by Ronald McDonald. English has created a story explaining why Americans have become obese. Using irony and sarcasm as methods through which to convey his story/message, the narration reveals that an alien, Orion, has come to earth to source food in the form of humans for his planet, but they are too thin. Conspiring with Ronald McDonald, an irresistible food is produced, but in "Orion", part of the "Freak Show" works, the now obese alien has also succumbed to this fast food and is too fat to return home.

It's worthwhile to shift away from the grotesque images and look closely at the artist's color palette. Every print was created initially as a painting and transferred to a digital format to produce the print. Color choices for these works provide a subliminal impact, reinforcing the message through a masterful grasp of color and its psychological impact. So does the large-scale imagery.

These super-sized prints amplify their message, particularly the "Guernica" commentaries. Two works on the far wall of the Clark gallery spin off of Picasso's famous "Guernica" painting that protested the inhumanity of the Spanish civil war under the dictatorial leadership of Franco. Exposing truth behind the image, "X-Ray Guernica" (11'x 17'), depicts the painting as an X-ray vision, referencing the X-ray method that museums use to discover other images under the visible surface. In this X-ray, only death is revealed; what lies beneath the surface of "Guernica" are the skeletons of the innocent. Presenting them for our generation, English wants us to remember and understand the original horrors expressed in Picasso's work, a result of using military force on an unarmed population.

English wants to make a difference. He has mounted his work internationally on billboards over ads of harmful products. He says that China, Palestine, and Spain have been the most receptive countries to his art; the United States is the least receptive. "I think that art is a lot more powerful than people realize," he said. "Because of the internet, we now have a decentralization of who can make art. You don't have to go to New York anymore; New York is for folks who move around in certain circles, and your circle may not exist." This is an alternative view to what mainstream art should be. The traditional art establishment may no longer have enough to say.

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