



Kitsch Construction I by Alexander Comminos

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: "STC's fotowerks, STICK, and Friends"
Where: Kika de la Garza Fine Arts Center, 921 E 12th Street, Mission
When: June 8 – July 6, 2019
Hours: 10am to 6pm Tuesday to Friday, 10am-2pm Saturday
Contact: (956) 583-2787
Free and open to the public

Mix and Match

This exhibition of current works by the South Texas College Ink and Clay Club is a laid-back gallery experience.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

The portfolios of clay artists come to light this summer with four ceramics exhibitions currently happening in our mid-Valley area. Along with Alexis Ramos showing her inedible edibles in Weslaco, next week we'll look at two more shows of this genre that just opened at STC. But for

now, the STC Clay Club's exhibition, "STC's fotowerks, STICK, and Friends" at the Kika de la Garza Fine Arts Center, has our attention. This modest showing of thirty-eight pieces is comfortably spaced in the central part of the UVAL gallery for consideration and conversation. STICK stands for South Texas Ink and Clay Club, and under the responsible eye of Chris Leonard there are ceramics, mixed media, and acrylic works, but only two photographs. This is a loosely organized group of students who create work outside the classroom.

Overall the exhibit is flawed. Ten artists whose maturity/experience levels range from beginner to instructor create a deep chasm of inequality among the works, and there is no clear installation organization to help the viewer adjust to the visual variances. In seeking a sophistication level here, familiar Harlingen ceramist Alex Comminos comes to our aid.

Doing a complete flip from his standard clay work, which usually consists of solitary objects and experimental glazes, Comminos treats us to his foray into the world of repurposing kitsch. Kitsch is identified as trite subject matter that evokes sentimentality without relevant artistic expression. With four strong works and tongue planted firmly in cheek, Comminos offers a twist on that. Displaying a cavalier irreverence, he combines unrelated kitsch objects with wit; originally the kitsch parts were completely unrelated, but Comminos brings them together by repurposing them in unexpected relationships, using their previously trite identities to create new stories and fresh humor.

"Kitsch Construction III" combines My Fair Lady with the Seven Dwarfs. Knowing the cultural references can evoke a whole new story in the viewer's mind. And a very engaging one at that. "They didn't have a whole run of the Seven Dwarfs, right?", commented Comminos on the five dwarfs that made it into that work. "Kitsch Construction IV" combines Zeus's daughters - the Three Graces - with the Dutch farm boy. The result appears to have spawned tiny pink figurines recalling the early 19th century European fashion. "Kitsch Construction I" reflects a wedding cake theme with a matador and a holy woman. Cherubs and cherub parts abound. To create each work, Comminos uses some pieces as he finds them, retouching and painting; sometimes he casts the parts he needs. Then in his words, he collides them.

Ana Lourdes Hernandez offers interesting works including a ceramic pinhole camera; her "Lady Obscura" boasts an opening for an enclosed pinhole to capture light. Hernandez also shows other camera-inspired pieces and photographs.

Another artist showing several pieces is Rick O Sullivan with ceramics, acrylic, and mixed media works. His strongest piece is the patriotic mixed media work, "United We stand", featuring an American flag that had flown itself into tattered fabric. It is placed over the image of a landscape and treated to solidify its shape, suggesting the action of still functioning despite its wear.

There are paintings and design works, but ceramics dominate this exhibit. In an exhibition of this nature, the quality range is maybe half the fun; there is aspiration without pretense.

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