



Weirdo at Full Capacity

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: “Shattering Taciturnity”
MFA Exhibition by Jesmil Maldonado Rodriguez
Where: Charles and Dorothy Clark Art Gallery, Edinburg Liberal Arts Building
South, UTRGV
When: August 26 – October 9, 2019
Hours: call ahead
Contact: (956) 665-3480

Shadows of Fear

Through an exacting style this artwork confronts the artist’s psychological nemeses.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

To be taciturn is to be reluctant to converse and share ideas or opinions. In her MFA exhibition, Jesmil Maldonado Rodriguez attempts to overcome these tendencies and open up to the fears and insecurities that disturb her. “Shattering Taciturnity”, on display at the Clark Gallery at UTRGV, is a series of prints, paintings, and drawings created in an exacting style that take on her psychological nemeses and reflect her artistic skills. The use of tonal and complimentary color contrasts, and an underlying sense of the unspeakable, establishes evocative content.

The insects are often a visible subject matter in her work, but Rodriguez’ art is about herself. She goes within and stays there, harvesting the rich colors of her homeland, Puerto Rico, and applying bright chroma to often macabre situations, such as the unnerving, “One Sermon and Two Rosaries “. She is simultaneously

disturbed/fascinated by nature, a fear of insects, the labels of food, human interactions, and “Tales of the Crypt” stories. These fears and anxieties emerge in her art as she avers that when made visible, the psychological disturbances are rendered powerless.

Insects have become a symbol of dark fears and anxieties that plague the artist. Presented as dark silhouettes, they are mysterious shadows - ideas whose powers must be controlled, and control is expressed by creating rigid patterns through image repetition.

While works such as the dark “Entomological Addictions” is indeed that kind of confrontation, Rodriguez achieves a sense of calm during their creation though a state of intense focus. The painting, “Entomological Drugs” exemplifies this. In this hypnotic visualization, the repetition of the precisely rendered insects and foliage become a curvilinear shaped pattern suggesting a stage of insect development proceeding over a black ground. “The repetition of elements is a way of controlling my anxiety, my perfectionism, and the best way to ignore my problems,” she admitted, “but at the same time it forces me to reflect, so I heal myself, I condemn myself, and isolate myself from the world.” And then she starts her cycle of anxiety and control all over again.

In addition to the insect motifs, there are works expressing her rebellion against social expectations, images that overcome her reluctant voice and state that her art is truly the visual extension of her identity. In “Weirdo at Full Capacity” the artist speaks of feelings of not quite belonging because of her idiosyncrasies. “I struggled most of my life accepting the person that I am,” she confessed, thinking that she was, in her own words, weird. In this excellent self-portrait she embraces her “weirdness” with a combination of figurative and textual imagery. Placing herself on the far right of the picture plane she balances text and anxiety symbols (silhouettes of beetles) that have become part of her. Repetitions of the word “anormal (weird)” in the background move into her own image; she now believes that it’s part of who she is and that these anxieties will help her grow as an artist. As the beetles and text become part of her, the beetles have turned to a bright chroma.

“I produce and repeat things that I love, but at the same time they consume me,” she concluded. “I compare this with my day-to-day, which contain elements that destroy me, weaken me, and silence me. In the end it's just me and my materials, that moment when there is no one to interfere with my artistic process.”

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