



*Rafael Serrano, Nogales*

## SURFACE TREATMENT

With COVID-19 slowing gallery openings, we will keep your art experiences alive by looking back at some interesting and still relevant exhibitions/reviews. Today we revisit photographer Stefan Falke's survey of Texas-Mexico border artists shown in 2014 at IMAS.

### **La Frontera: Artists Across the US Mexican Border**

A one-man photographic survey of the border art scene featuring artists and art institutions

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

A remarkable experience is currently on display at IMAS. "La Frontera: Artists Across the US Mexican Border" by New York photographer Stefan Falke documents 180 artists who live and work in cities along the US-Mexico border spanning Tijuana to Matamoros. Falke's portraits of artists are images of beauty, expressing passion for the perfect setting. This is a digital showing; there are no photographs hung on the walls, but rather progressive projections of photographs of artists, video interviews with artists, and musicians' videos.

"The whole idea (of this project) is to overwhelm the viewer by the sheer number of artists there are along the border," stated Falke. The idea began when he fell in love with Tijuana and its vibrant art community while on a visit in 2008. "So far, my total is 180 artists," he continued, "and I call this series: artists along the border, not art along the border. I'm very interested in the people who do the art almost more than the art itself. It's really a project about people who are very active and positive and who are working in a field that I think greatly benefits communities. I wanted to stay on the Mexican side, but that changed. To me it's like one region."

Falke also wants to counter the notion that the border is a negative place filled with criminals. He presents a modern image of the border to a global community where blood wars, chaos and tequila are the usual perceptions. When asked if he put artists in danger by showing their work internationally, he was told that usually the artists are being left alone by the criminals because it's art - they respect art. But as soon as it has a slight journalistic touch, you're in danger.

This digital exhibit will be a fresh experience for Valley viewers. The artists are presented in categories such as “All artists and promoters”, “Emerging visual artists”, “Established visual artists”, “Videos of Female Artists”, and “Musicians”. Each category is time sequenced and projected on the wall or on TV monitors. There are also three iPhones with Informal digital images of visits with artists. The names and locations of the subjects are listed on the far wall and are not provided in the digital projections.

Falke also considers anyone who promotes cultural activities as important as the artists. He revealed that being on the border and meeting the artists was his big reward for this project, despite the resulting book and the exhibits. “I also don’t find these artists because I like their art,” he added. “I don’t want to show something that is my judgment - this is a not a project about me liking the art of some people. I don’t have to agree with their art, I can still like them. McAllen area artists and art promoters included in this project are David Carren, Imanol Miranda, Manuel Miranda, Paul Valadez, Ramon Barela, Veronica Jaeger, Phyllis Evans, Joseph Bravo, Kirk Clark, Christian Mueller, and Scott Nicol.

The La Frontera project is ongoing. With an earnest chuckle, Falke says that he is attempting to see everybody over the next thirty years. “I can’t stop this,” he confessed, “I just want to continue. Whether it’s 180, 500, or 1,000 artists – I don’t care. I want to create a huge website, like a database of all the artists, to connect the border with itself.”

Update: Falke has completed his website, and you may see the publication of this project, “La Frontera: Artists Across the Border” by Stefan Falke, complete with the photographs of artists included in the publication by going to <https://www.stefanfalke.com/Published/La-Frontera-book/3>

*Nancy Moyer, Professor Emerita of Art, is an art critic for The Monitor. She may be reached at [nmoyer@rgv.rr.com](mailto:nmoyer@rgv.rr.com)*