



Disguise by Alejandro Macias

## SURFACE TREATMENT

What: "Texas We're Listening"  
Where: Brownsville Museum of Fine Art, 660 E Ringgold St., Brownsville  
When: Sept 14-Oct 25, 2019  
Hours: 10am-4pm, Mon-Tues; 10am-8pm, Wed; 10am-4pm, Thurs-Sat.  
Contact: 956 542 0941  
General admission applies.

### **What We're All About**

Evocative works by artists who were stimulated by big issues while living in Texas

BY NANCY MOYER

### SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

Three strong artists come together for this exhibition at the Brownsville Museum of Fine Art, filling the central gallery with ways of seeing contemporary life. Although their work is not "Texas specific", "Texas We're Listening" offers perceptions formed while living in the Lone Star State by Cody Arnall, Joe Harjo, and Alejandro Macias. Macias speaks through paintings and drawings, Harjo through performing prints, and Arnall creates technological and found object sculptures; their ideas focus on identity, the socio-political climate, and the environment.

A cursory glance at this show suggests that there could be no connecting link among these artists, but there is; it forms an entity of human capacity. With several works from

each of them, we also gain a comfortable sense of who they are. This exhibit comments deeply on the contemporary reality in which we live, and which lives in us. Macias and Harjo tell us who we are, while Arnall tells us what we do.

Arnall has serious issues with the history of human behavior paired with unique expressions. His free-standing sculptures are dramatic and enigmatic unless you understand what's going on. (Relying on electronics for their message, have the museum plug them in). There is also a long table filled with small, maquette-sized works from unusual scrap materials. His message is big-picture-dark; humanity is now building its own destruction through a desire for power. As a part of nature, we are harming ourselves in irreversible ways through deception, conflict, and aggression. Absurdity adds a bit of humor now and then, but "Straight Razor the Earth" gets right to the point. This conflicted work reflects the result of human activity for a problematic progress. From gathered and salvaged objects to electronic age projections and gadgets, he sums up the human path of progress from simple to destructively complex.

An artistic whiplash moves us from Arnall's complex lesson on the foibles of humanity to the simple imagery of Harjo's depictions of social attitudes. These "performing prints" were made during the artist's performances. Pairs of shoe-tread prints and prints of his bare feet, are cleanly made on white paper and comment about contemporary social identity in the United States. The series, "Indian Holding a Weapon", references himself as a Native American, as well making the larger statement that this could be any Native American, or, really, anyone. It's easy to be pulled into his thought sequence with "Indian Holding a Weapon (Gun)" or "Indian Holding a Weapon (American History Book)". At first, we feel each print through the Native American perspective, then through our own.

Macias' work is driven by his Mexican American identity and the current socio-political climate, and we are, logically, an outsider looking in with this mask series. He sees masks as a part of human identity - sometimes just a mask, sometimes in a political framework, and sometimes as a social manifestation. "Disguise", a graphite drawing, pulls us into his game. A wrinkled rubber mask appearing to be that of Ronald Reagan is pushed up to expose the face of...who? But through Macias' masterful drawing skills, we know that this deception is not a good thing. On a personal level, "Altered" shows a realistic self-portrait with abstracted lines and shapes superimposed. It is the mask of cultural assimilation in action.

Arnall teaches sculpture at Texas tech University, Harjo teaches photography and visual literacy at the Southwest School of Art, and Macias, originally from Brownsville, is now a faculty member at the University of Arizona School of Art.

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