



Heidi by Lisa Carlisle

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: "The Phoenix Gallery Grand Opening"
Where: 18 S. Main Street, McAllen
When: By appointment
Contact: (956) 490-7454.

New Opportunities

A day dedicated to the dead gives birth to a new downtown gallery

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

November 2 always offers a hardy assortment of Dias de los Muertos exhibitions in McAllen, and this year, restaurateur and artist, Isaac Guerra, used that day to celebrate the Grand Opening of his new undertaking, The Phoenix Gallery. Discretely located in an old building on S. Main Street, the entrance is identified by a modest stairway ascending directly from the street. Day of the Dead themes along with non-themed art works are currently being shown, including Guerra's own paintings, works from his private collection, and general art works reflecting familiar styles. Works in this gallery are meant to please rather than surprise or enlighten and the Dias de los Muertos pieces were above the usual fare that we usually see this time of year. Delvis Cortez' three-piece "In Harm's Way speaks of veiled mortality, while an unlabeled print by Trevino depicts a calavera rolling out masa amid scattered chili peppers; she wears a headpiece reminiscent of that of the Statue of Liberty, but I might be reaching. The display

consists of an eclectic collection of works ranging from the decorative to the highly professional. I was pleased to see a painting by Sandra Uries whose work I admired at the Bellas Artes in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. There are also several works by Hector Aristo and Douglas Clark.

“I’ve always been one to go back into the downtown area,” Guerra mused, “like my first restaurant, España, it kinda created what is now restaurant row on Main Street, and if you look at our first bar downtown, Cine del Rey, it created what is now the bar scene of downtown.” Guerra now owns The Centennial restaurant, which is located in the same hundred-year-old building complex as the new gallery. The old building offers a loft space with hardwood floors from the turn of the century and feels like a part of urban history. “And we wanted to enhance that rather than moving somewhere out of the heart of the city, he added.” Sharing his idea for the gallery, Guerra said that over the years he’s met a lot of local talent and traveling artists from different places available to this area. His restaurants and the theater have been used to show those artists. Guerra confessed that he had actually been looking for a small office around the corner from his current business when this property became available. “What better way to do the art!” he thought. “We decided to go wall to wall with all my friends’ art – those people I’ve admired for years. We could all hang together.”

The purpose of The Phoenix Gallery is to benefit artists and collectors, not so much the general public. It will operate according to the professional gallery practice of being the sales agent for a select group of artists; someone may like a single work on display but want to have it customized or see more works by that artist. The Gallery can facilitate a connection. Art buyers are presently limited to whatever is on display at an art space and might not be able to communicate with the artist successfully for alternative works. The Valley lacks galleries that professionally represent artists who work in contemporary styles, and according to Guerra, The Phoenix Gallery, consisting of eight rooms and a hallway, can provide representation for artists all over America as well as Mexico.

Unfortunately, there are no open viewing hours; works must be seen by appointment only. But that could change later on with plans to have events with artists painting in the studio spaces during the weekends. However, private tours are available.

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