



Facts by Lewis J Crawford

SURFACE TREATMENT

With COVID-19 slowing gallery openings, we will keep your art experiences alive by looking back at some still relevant shows/reviews. Today we revisit the "Token Gesture Portfolio" exhibited at the McAllen Public Library, Spring 2014.

Token Gesture Portfolio

This series of prints considers the possibilities of the idiom, 'token gestures' , gestures done for the sake of appearance.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

An enjoyable and relevant exhibition is now being shown at the McAllen Public Library. "Token Gesture Portfolio" is a series of stunning black and white relief prints bringing together the wit and imagination of several professional printmakers. The artists participating in this portfolio project were asked to design a token based on a contemporary issue (financial, environmental, social, political, or etc.), and this portfolio is the result. Presented as either a 24" or 18" print on 26" x 26" paper, these robust designs address issues ranging from the very personal to the universal.

Stefanie Dykes of Saltgrass Printmakers, an organization based in Salt Lake City, organized the project. Originally exhibited at IMPACT8 in Dundee, Scotland, it is on display in the Lobby Gallery.

Historically, tokens are cultural objects that reflect a history of colonialism, exploitation, and modern consumerism. Often used during times of political and financial crisis, the token was in effect a redeemable pledge. This pledge was

redeemable for goods and services, as were-once-upon-a-time wooden nickels - coin-like objects used instead of currency during hard times. Specific trade tokens were often designed and given to placate employees, persuade voting populace, or entice customers to purchase merchandise. Some of you might remember discount bus tokens.

While tokens of the past usually offered a direct empirical usage, these token gestures have a psychological bite built into them and eschew practicality. Cynicism is easy to find. "Empty Words" by Travis Janssen speaks of the insincerity often found in company or organizational appreciation plaques and gestures. "Facts," by Lewis J Crawford, suggests presenting this token to your local TV news agency for one story based on factual information. Some of them speak of disillusionment, such as the "Obama=Zero Cents" token by Brian Taylor. The token states that it is "redeemable for any loss of hope." Humor, or possibly a warning, is contained in "Redeem Token for a Chance to Open a Big Can of Worms" by Adam Larsen. Nick Mendoza suddenly turns a scary corner. His token, "Good for One Border Crossing," leaves us with an uneasy feeling in these days of Border violence; isn't the bearer going to come back? The wit and imagination go on.

The technique used in making these prints may be interesting to some of you. Moving beyond the early 20th century aesthetic of the skill-based art product, this print exhibit endorses the idea/concept as the paramount aspect of an artwork. The design for each print was fed into a computer using CNC (computer numerical control) and a relief plate was laser cut in a fraction of the time it would have taken the printmaker to cut it manually in wood or linoleum. But with a nod to the traditional block-print craft, the plates were hand-inked and printed.

On loan from Jesus De La Rosa, Assistant Professor at TAMU-Kingsville, the "Token Gesture Portfolio" is sponsored by the International Museum of Art & Science and will be up for another month. In addition to its being a fun art experience, this exhibit offers some serious insights into contemporary life.

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