



*Coffee is My Morning Ritual* by Alex Macias

### SURFACE TREATMENT

What: UTRGV School of Art Faculty Exhibition  
Where: Dorothy and Charles Clark Art Gallery, Liberal Arts Building South, main Campus  
When: Through March 21  
Hours: 9am-12pm weekdays  
Contact: Ma. Elena Macias at 956-665-3480

UTRGV Art Faculty: Expressive Currents

This collection includes works that are informed by concerns deeply and personally felt.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

Over the years, art has been identified as a major indicator in understanding the social ethos of epochs, countries, and even political regimes, Through the eyes of its artists, we have been able to discover the unofficial habits of historical communities. Sometimes this information harmonizes with a known stance; other times, we see the voice of dissent - the underlying dystopian mood, and we have it all with the current “UTRGV School of Art Faculty Exhibition”. Displayed in the Clark Gallery on the main campus, this very interesting exhibition of works reads as a single installation about the university’s School of Art ethos. Most of the full-time art faculty and adjuncts are participating with clay, conceptual art, installation, painting, sculpture, printmaking, prints, photography, and graphic design. This exhibition is a fascinating expression of disunity.

Contemporary artists commonly react to personal and social issues by using them as subjects, such as we see in Celeste de Luna’s bold woodcut print, “Woman Fence.” But it is not common to see undercurrents of the social climate, the uncertainty, divisiveness, and anger, exposed as an incidental exhibition pattern. Considering that the UTRGV School of Art has been without a Director since summer, lack of leadership has created a vacuum allowing individuals to form separate alliances with each alliance

maneuvering for power, seeking security, and desiring stability. The School is experiencing workplace free fall. Dystopia can be agonizing for those involved, but their art can excel. "Art Faculty Exhibition" presents works that are informed by issues deeply and emotionally felt, needing overt expression. Anger flares in M.C. Farris's image on wood, "No Concerns for Sheep", portraying the classic predator - a wolf whose teeth drip with the blood of innocent prey. With hostility to spare, De Luna's "Woman Fence" is a scathing indictment of immigration law, and although Donna Swiegart and Tom Murray's collaboration, "Chankla 'Homage to Mark Clouet'", is presented as a sentimental and amusing concept, this country has uncomfortable myths about cement footwear. A sizeable and aggressive painting submitted by Rey Santiago, bursts with violent reds and color contrasts. Hung in a curiously modest space, the viewer must leave the gallery and view the painting from outside the glass wall in order to appreciate it, while Murray's dominantly white "Untitled" painting of a lone nude enjoys open spaces. Painted over with a cold white paint, which is slowly transforming her into stone, Murray says that his subject reacts with indifference at the obliteration of her world. Yet her subtle expression suggests more. And with his sculpture, "Why are Ships Called SHE?", Douglas Clark transforms a female form into a sailing vessel; translucent resin torso shapes, possibly serving as sails, appear as ghostly apparitions attempting to leave the empty husk beneath them. Yellow cords reminiscent of crude sutures at once support and restrict them.

Stepping away from the angst, Alex Macias provides emotional respite with his personally relatable painting, "Coffee is My Morning Ritual", and Jing Zhang offers "Beard Flows", a tiny and whimsical beaded piece suggesting the care and perceived preciousness of men's beards. Scattered throughout the rest of the show are works reflecting detachment, folding in on themselves rather than projecting outward. There is minimal experimental play or exploration of materials or forms, but what this exhibition does offer is sincere visual communication from the depths of its artists.

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