



Seen Better Days by Dennis Grover

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: "UVAL Annual Members Exhibition"
Where: Kika de la Garza Fine Arts Center, 921 E 12th Street, Mission
When: Through Dec 2, 2018
Hours: 10am to 6pm Tuesday to Friday, 2-5pm Saturday
Contact: (956) 583-2787
Free and open to the public

A Cautionary Tale

Although there are a few fine artworks here, critical selection could have improved this exhibition.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

The "UVAL Annual Members Exhibition" at the Kika de la Garza Fine Arts Center this year probably offered more to think about than to see. Yes, there were a few positive art experiences in this show, but only a few compared to what we have come to expect from this group in the past few years. This exhibition is a cautionary tale. Probably there was a variety of genres, but the exhibition strategy, or lack of it, made it difficult to determine exactly what was going on. Representing distinctly opposite aesthetics, Noreen Graf and Dee Tunseth offered excellent contemporary recycled works and superbly executed traditional watercolors. Graf presented a series of works made from old credit cards that she saved and recycled. "When I started to create art with them," Graf elaborated, "people started giving me their old cards. Some people were nervous, so they'd cut off the numbers. And then from credit cards it

expanded to hotel room keys, and all kinds of cards.” Some of the works using cards that carry Graf’s name, her children’s names, and her relatives’ names, become a history. The pivotal piece, “My Credit History,” includes cards that go back to 1985 and is personally meaningful to the artist. Included in this series is a delightfully whimsical actual-sized “Table and Chairs” set. Tunseth’s classic watercolors never disappoint. Her transparent watercolor, “Wild Olive”, conveys all the brilliant tonal patterning and unique detail of shapes that has come to characterize her work.

The major problem with this exhibit is the amount of works that suggest a beginner’s effort. These works lack the choice of interesting subject matter as well as demonstrating insecure control of the medium. And there are enough of these to affect the whole exhibition. In the past, an exhibition coordinator oversaw what was being shown; this year, it was an open volunteer effort; there was no single coordinator. Anything was acceptable, resulting in a cautionary tale about what happens to an exhibition with no structural/critical oversight. Aesthetic chaos. Embrace it or not, leadership helps. Another phenomenon arose, which might have been overlooked under other conditions. There were the copies of celebrity photographs and a reproduction of the Aztec Calendar under a policy that forbids copies. Copyright considerations aside, it was explained to me that UVAL has painters who copied photographs, but the final painting or drawing is considered theirs. In the taking of something that’s there and making it your own,-we need to understand when it is acceptable to appropriate an image and when it’s, well, theft. Rick Sullivan’s Aztec calendar also offered food for thought on this topic. UVAL member, Chris Leonard, offered an opinion: “That’s a technical exploration with Sullivan and his brother-in-law who works at the tech center and made his own CNC, so I think it was a technical exercise as much as an artistic offering.” Sullivan stood by his work, saying, “It took us a year to make the code to make this and It’s not exactly like the Aztec Calendar, there are a few things that are a little different on it. And I think it’s art.” I think different genres can reflect differing degrees of artistic legitimacy in relation to surrounding works, and Sullivan’s piece seemed questionable in a milieu of traditional art forms. So the overall exhibition strategy of anything goes actually threw some works into question. A new UVAL logo designed by Chris Van Dyke is also on display. As a sculptural bas relief, it’s quite nice.

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