



*Best Friends by Jorge A Cruz*

#### SURFACE TREATMENT

What: UVAL Members Exhibition  
Where: Kika de la Garza Fine Arts Center, 921 E 12<sup>th</sup> Street, Mission  
When: Through April 6, 2019  
Hours: 10am to 6pm Tuesday to Friday, 2-5pm Saturday  
Contact: (956) 583-2787  
Free and open to the public

#### **All Inclusive**

This member's exhibition offers comfortable transitions between traditional and contemporary works, as well as art and design.

BY NANCY MOYER

#### SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

A spate of new members gives this year's Upper Valley Art League exhibition a robust edge. The large gallery space is typically filled with the member's works, but unlike the Annual Members show a couple of months ago, this one is well organized and offers a pleasurable viewing experience. Works are generally arranged according to subject, allowing the exhibition to flow comfortably from work to work, but even the art itself seems more interesting – there are unexpected individual revelations from individual members as well as interesting clusters of works from UVAL's workshops. A featured workshop produced thoughtful design-oriented results using triangular shapes, with the most dramatic piece being "Sharks Teeth (triangle)" by

Chris Mari Van Dyck. Images of sharks' teeth forming a diagonal jaw-line confront us in this digital photographic work, their strength and power permeating the black and white space.

The expected overall tone of UVAL member's exhibitions is one of conservative approaches and traditional subject matter, and this holds true once again. But the departures from this norm on the part of a few of the artists did not act as incompatible bursts of defiance, but rather added an invigorating spice to the overall flavor. Surprises occurred beginning with Van Dyck's several social protest pieces. "Laws Waivered to Build Border Wall" shows rows of red and white stripes, reflecting the design of the US flag, with each one stating a waived law. Not only does it speak to the viewer, it shouts. Noreen Graf continued her unique credit card direction, but also took a sudden turn into painting, taking her card aesthetic with her. Her oil and acrylic painting, "Woman in Woods" is a true conundrum. Although it appears to be two paintings that have been cut into small tiled shapes and reconfigured, that is not the whole story. Closer inspection reveals more manipulation of subjects involved throughout the composition and not simply juxtaposed paintings. Are we truly so out of joint with ourselves as well as with nature? Another painting by Graf, "Reconfigured Woman", expresses a similar manipulated approach. Fran Wessel's fiber work, "Animal Tracks", is an unusual quilted design demonstrating a lighthearted use of square shapes with scattered paw prints and images of other creatures. There were several very good traditional works that focused on children or pets, and to my mind the best of that group was "Best Friends" by Jorge A Cruz. Sure, it drips with sentimentality, but succeeds through its unique composition and Cruz' painting skills. There were also the expected wildlife works, and while noble or popular bird species and colorful insects are the usual suspects, Mujtaba H Naqvi's "Native 5" is a stunningly beautiful capture of grasshoppers. In Naqvi's photograph, the insects' legs create a unifying network of triangles as they feed on a native plant. With more than one object in this image, a sensitive focal point adds an impressive aesthetic to the picture. Across the gallery, this play of focus reappears in a series of beautifully executed achromatic airbrush drawings by Pete Krystiniac, reflecting visions of feminine beauty of past decades.

This member's exhibit was long on paintings, watercolors, and a few ceramics, but short on sculpture (none). But the overall diversity of personal approaches and the general quality of this exhibition compensate for any shortcomings and make this show a stimulating visit.

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