



Station V: He Then Fell Once More

SURFACE TREATMENT

While the COVID-19 situation is keeping the galleries closed, we want to keep your art experiences alive. So for the next few weeks, Surface Treatment will be looking back at memorable shows/reviews, as well as offering some new and special online exhibitions. Our first online exhibit will be published next week. Today's review was published in 2005 and is the first re-visiting of memorable past reviews/exhibits.

Vincent Valdez' "Stations" offers a winning round of art at TSTC
BY NANCY MOYER
SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

Stations, a series of large charcoal drawings by San Antonio artist Vincent Valdez, is a knockout. The series depicts a boxer's progress from the weigh in, to the ultimate knockout. Please forgive my pun, but the impact of this work is stronger than the usual art experience and is the most exciting work that I have seen in a while. The exhibition was brought to Harlingen as part of a celebration to honor Army Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez and the late U.S. District Judge Filimon Vela, Sr. "Filimon Vela, Jr., actually owns this exhibit," said Alice Green, Director of Public Information at TSTC. "He owns a lot of Valdez' work."

"Stations" is a narrative exhibition comprised of ten large charcoal drawings and four smaller ones. It is a metaphorical reflection of the Stations of the Cross applied to one

night in the life of a boxer. The first drawing, "Weigh In: Coming in at 140 lbs. 8oz", reflects the typical size of works in the exhibit, 40"x 60." The boxer-hero symbolizes everyman facing his destiny; life is hard. We fall, but must keep getting up. According to Valdez in the TSTC flier, "We all walk the same paths and we all face our own destiny. We all face our own fights and our own fears."

Stations encompasses several layers of meaning. The Christian reference is synthesized with the American Realism idiom: the common man as hero. "Station VI: Every Man Must Fall", shows the fallen boxer beaten and down. The spirit of Christ is almost knocked out of him and we see the transparent spirit rising from his body. Valdez goes beyond formal Realism into a heightened idiom that seems to have absorbed the complete human essence. His command of portraiture is impressive. The selected individuals cast as his characters are powerful depictions, and easily create bonds - familiar and maybe even personal - with viewers. I felt like I have known these people.

The Baroque use of light and dark recalling the battle between good and evil becomes a current of emotional energy that not only provides visual drama, but also forcefully captures the full attention of the viewer. Insightful compositional devices provide a formal elegance to these works. Woven into the visual experience is the tightly controlled emotional frame of hope and disappointment. Finally, there is the brilliant charcoal technique of Vincent Valdez. Every inch of drawing is cared for. His love affair with the subject, shapes, and charcoal overwhelm our senses and give us the satisfaction that comes with significant works of art.

"Station III" uses tonal contrast for emotional expression. The boxer, standing in the ring, faces us. The viewer is eye level to his belt that gives the figure a sense of power. Behind him is darkness. Although there is a sense of uncertainty in his face, he is a symbol of inner strength. The bright lights reflected off his chest seem to actually be coming from within the boxer himself, creating a powerful depiction of hope.

"Station V: He Then Fell Once More", shows a bird's eye view of the boxer on the mat. This angle gives the viewer the uncomfortable sensation of being the spirit of the figure looking down at his/our damaged body. There is also a sensation of the figure sliding down the mat, that feeling of being on the floor, but still falling.

However, "Station VIII: A Fine Performance by a Winning Fighter Tonight", is ultimately the brutal station. The title captures the callousness of the audience and of life itself. We are reminded of the Roman coliseum and realize that we are cultural descendants of that mindset; we are still supporting that spectacle. Our boxer is partially visible on the mat; his blood is draining onto the canvas while his opponent celebrates victory in the background.

This is an exceptional artistic experience, and one not to be missed. Valdez is an artist on a fast forward setting. See him now.

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