



El Menudo by Anna Marie Salinas Varela

SURFACE TREATMENT

With COVID-19 rebounding and slowing gallery openings, we will keep your art experiences alive by looking back at some more memorable shows/reviews. Today we remember Harlingen's Gallery 218 and its "First Annual Women's Exhibition", January 2010.

First Annual Women's Exhibition

Although subtle, there is a firm sense of the feminine psyche that permeates this exhibit.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

Outstanding women artists from South Texas comprise this attention-catching exhibit with works expressing a uniquely personal and relevant point of view. The "First Annual Women's Exhibition" at Gallery 218 in Harlingen initiates what is hoped to be an annual event showcasing the artistic force of women artists. On entering the gallery, there is difficulty in determining a visual focus, as there seems to be a little bit of everything in this large and relatively undefined space. However, variety turns out to be one of the strengths of the show.

"Twenty artists are represented from Corpus to Laredo," said Maggie Rodriguez, Gallery 218 PR Director. "The first thing that we thought of was the rapid rise of women in society over the years. We thought that would be great as a theme, but after much thought we decided not to have a theme. Let the artists bring what they feel. We received an abundance of great work to display." Abundance indeed. The gallery space is filled with works representing practically every media, with subjects and concepts spanning an exhilarating range of direction. Some artists show several works, others a solo piece.

A work that attracted me immediately for its uniqueness and flawless construction was a small mixed media sculpture by Monique Lopez. "The Symbolic Practice of Self Control" used CAD technology to create an oversized tooth, splitting open to reveal a set of actual human teeth. Suspended between the upper and lower plates is a colorful chain. To close or not to close? A formal piece or social commentary?

Eva Soliz displays painting and sculpture that also speak of control. Her painting, "The Player", expresses this concept in a most unusual way. A woman plays with or manipulates what appear to be chess pieces morphed into small human figures. There is a palpable tension between the woman and some of the figures. While the image of the woman reflects natural hues, all other objects appear as hyper-chromatic fantasy. Soliz is a master colorist. "I studied painting more than I did sculpture," she admitted. "I love both; I think they feed off each other. I was interested in children's toys and applying them to my art. I've been working with the one in "Punch Drunk" for a year, as well as the dynamics that occur within the games that people might play. I wonder who is really the manipulator? Who's in control of the game?"

"A Cool Dip in the Crown Fountain" by Laura Andersen commemorates this amazing public artwork in Chicago. The smiling man facing us reflects pleasure, with the artistic treatment of his head brilliantly superimposed over the fountain scene, happily converting and physically absorbing the experience into his memories.

Other works of note include paintings by Esmeralda Benitez whose visual comments on vanity were bold and elegant; "Ritually" effectively communicates obsession with stylish beauty. "Sing", a powerful welded steel sculpture of a woman's head by Carla Hughes, shows elongated pieces of steel emanating from her widely open mouth, blocking any song that she could sing. Anna Marie Sanchez Varela shows an ambitious painting with "El Menudo". Offering eye candy in the form of color and pattern, it celebrates the Mexican American culture of South Texas.

Although Harlingen may seem out of the way, this show makes the trip worthwhile. If you haven't visited Gallery 218, the "First Annual Women's Exhibition" would be a good introduction.

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