



Hole by Joshua Costillo

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: "Signals"
Where: North American Art Gallery, 417 N, 17th Street, McAllen
When: Feb 7-Feb 31, 2020
Contact: (210) 744-6253 for viewing

Three World Views

A flow of shapes, heightened realism and imaginative drawing make up this eclectic collection of art.

BY NANCY MOYER
SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

"Signals" presents works by Manuel Zamudio, Travis Trapp, and Josh Castillo, whose world views

unexpectedly overlap into each other's works, establishing an unexpected sense of conceptual unity. All three artists explore the conceivable flexibility of our empirical world through separate sets of aesthetics, often resulting in a tension between the works that complements or clashes, depending on the viewer's point of view. Zamudio hosted this exhibition through the invitation of the North American Art Gallery.

Zamudio has the most clearly established direction of the three with his probabilities of ultimate social decay. As his technical and heightened realistic treatment of the human visage becomes stronger, the civilized landscape crumbles further into decay. Castillo attempts to build a new landscape, one that vacillates between the microcosmic world and the broader

cosmos. While Zamudio's reality is futuristic, and Costillo's is timeless, Trapp embraces a stable past while still determining where fantastic creatures fit into the plan.

Zamudio's paintings show us the last vestiges of a dying culture and the embers of human expression; the light of future existence is growing dim. In this world the soul of a society thrives or dies based solely on the affirmations of its unique individuals upholding what identity is left, and he portrays identities stunningly. "Just as ancient peoples planted the flags of burgeoning civilizations in caves," Zamudio mused, "the hope in the twilight of a society rests on those still willing to write on the walls." While this is a double-entendre and metaphorical statement, his painting, "At the Feet of Wise Men", illustrates the complete notion. Here, a woman embodying hope stands beneath a graffiti-covered statue that suggests an ancient teacher. Hopelessness emanates in "Doomed", where linear gray-creature background images signify a psychic landscape layer.

Reflecting the academic, Trapp is inspired through ideas and concepts derived from mythology, folklore, personal experiences, and sequential art. As an educator, he explores archetypes and lore. "I believe many systems are inherently connected, especially in the visual arts," Trapp opined. "While some interpretations (of my work) may not be intended, I enjoy conceptual interpretations by the viewer." His work also involves more than one style, moving in and out of abstraction, realism, and fantasy, each one leaving us wanting more. Just when the abstractions seem to be the main direction, he moves us onto the "Chimera" series, and the "Cultivation" print successfully combines realism and abstract elements. His linear styling is his constant, culminating in the dynamic hatching marks found in the "Chimeras".

All the artists show strength with imaginative concepts, yet Costillo favors an ingenious foray into the microcosmic world. His abstract landscapes are loosely inspired by plant and animal cell diagrams and played out in a dual cosmos of micro-macro dynamics. Every painting starts as an ongoing project and slowly becomes a "puzzle" which allows a foreground to push into a receding background. Primary shapes, the ones inspired by cell diagrams, resemble beans/candies/medications/bacteria and we are left to determine their intent as they swarm to form landscapes, often swirling into eddies. In "Hole", they are swarming into an ambiguous point and their shapes resemble untwisted, yet playful, party balloons.

A sense of playfulness periodically appears with Costillo and Trapp. Trapp and Zamudio sometimes share reality's uncertainties while Zamudio and Costillo wonder about the landscape. All three have world-view narratives showing both positive and negative aspects that, again, depend on the viewer's point of view.

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