



A Tribute to the Sovereign Jaguar Diety

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: *A Tribute to the Mayan Culture* by Andy A. Villarreal
Where: Beyond Arts Gallery, 114 North A Street, Harlingen
When: Through Oct 22. Hours are Wed-Fri: 1pm-5pm,
Sat: 10am -5pm
Contact: (956) 230-2859

A Personal Slant

A Tribute to the Mayan Culture is also a tribute to the flexibility of Andy Villarreal's imagination and his exuberance of color. In his recent exhibit at Beyond Arts Gallery, Villarreal shows oils, acrylics, drawings, monotypes, collage, and mixed media inspired by his visits to the Mexican heartland.

Influenced by Mayan culture for the last twenty years as well as the Mexican culture in general, his slant on the Maya may initially confuse the viewer. One needs to acclimate to his unique imagery where the ancient Maya are perceived as a springboard into his own psyche, where historical and stylistic boundaries are slippery. Paintings that feature Mayan priests or deities are not trying to depict them in their ancient format, but rather cast them in artistic scenarios that expand on Villarreal's memories of place. "I have been to several of the different Mayan pyramids at different times," he explained, "and when I do this work, it's what I feel after I come back from those places, after experiencing that culture." And he takes lots of liberties.

Memories can be true or false, and having a broad set can always prove to be a rich resource for the artist. In his painting, "The Mayan Warriors Go on a Naval Adventure," Villarreal puts his Mayans on a symbolic raft on a downhill slope. There is almost an Aegean flavor to the scene and it might be assumed that this is a sea voyage, but on closer inspection, the raft represents death and the water is the watery underworld of the dead.

The title, "The Mighty Mayan Warrior Takes a Slave Peacefully," is sarcastic," says the artist about this particularly interesting oil painting. "He's pulling the hell out of this guys hair in front of the bistro; I personalized it into a contemporary setting. I put in the diagonals and it looked too plain, so I decorated it, and then it looked like the tiles in a coffee shop." Villarreal says that sometimes he thinks about what's going on today, and after he came up with that title, he thought that whole theme could be current. Villarreal is not only playing with a flexible time continuum here, but also comments on inequality. He shows the slave becoming skeletal, a frequent social outcome of the powerful over the weaker. The surfaces of Villarreal's paintings communicate mood and emotion. His tonal contrasts create a dramatic sense to his scenarios, while his contrasting colors inject the proper peak excitement. A lot goes on here.

"I found as I've been getting older," he mused, "my work is going back to the culture of Mexico. When I was younger I painted different kinds of things, but now I see things differently than I did twenty or thirty years ago." Although he loves and respects European cultures and places like the Louvre, he believes that what really matters is your own roots - wherever you feel that connection. "That has a real strong impact on me," he concluded.

Nancy Moyer, Professor Emerita of Art from UTRGV, is an art critic for The Monitor. She may be reached at nmoyer@rgv.rr.com