



*Sea of Fantasy*

## SURFACE TREATMENT

What: *Melted Vibrancy* by Cristina Materón  
Where: UVAL, Kika de la Garza Art Center, 921 E. 12th Street, Mission.  
When: Through Aug. 5: Hours are Tues, Wed and Thurs from 10am to 6pm; Fri 10am-2pm; Saturday, 2-6pm.  
Contact: 956 583-ARTS

### Heightened Memories

For her new exhibit, *Melted Vibrancy*, Cristina Materón creates fantastic scenarios for her precisely rendered paintings of birds and sea life along with other works on display at the Kika de la Garza Art Center. Inspired by the natural flora and fauna of the artist's native Colombia, *Melted Vibrancy* features a large number of acrylic paintings and completely fills UVAL's generous space. Although there is a sense of time span among some of the works, the only early paintings are a small group on the far wall. Otherwise, focused series include dancers, colorful and festive paintings of horses, and the major series that depicts tropical birds and sea life in imaginary abstracted backgrounds.

The bird paintings and the sea life paintings express a counterpoint relationship between realistically rendered subjects set against abstract expressionistic backgrounds, which to Materón capture the feeling of nature in Colombia. "Everything comes from my memories of Colombia," exclaimed Materón. "And it all comes from nature." With this in mind, Materón has produced a series of magically glorious and enhanced perceptions of her natural world. Typically, "Serene Elegance," depicting a parrot with its wings stretched back incorporates a background landscape that feels tropical, but in fact is a counterplay between the real and the abstract. "Ibis Harmony" goes further with a more enthusiastic effect. Here, abstract shapes in the background take on the felt energy of the tropical rain forest. Pure shape intermingles with referenced shape and surrounds the vermilion ibis with symphonic combinations that convince us of a reality.

Materón is primarily interested in the formal qualities in her paintings - particularly the relationship between realism and abstraction. "I've been working on how to relate the abstract world to realism," she says, "and I'm getting to a middle point where I'm doing

half realism and half abstraction. It has to come out of me, so I like a little bit of the abstract expressionistic.” With “Sea of Fantasy” the fish subtly begin to turn into abstractions. This painting has a truly magical feeling about it due to Materón’s sensitive play of tonal and chromatic contrasts. The image could suggest the positive aspect of nuclear evolution.

Her other series show geometric backgrounds rather than the more successful expressionistic ones. The horse series is the best of these.

While Materón suggested the geometric shapes echoed the rhythmic play of the animals’ gait, I feel that this kind of abstract background does not effectively capture the spirit of the subject as successfully as the bird paintings. Rather, it reads as a decorative backdrop. Materón’s expressionistic current emerges in the horses themselves with the otherwise realistic portrayals containing unexpected coloration, reminiscent of early German Expressionism. “The Age of Freedom” has charm, but we’re uncertain about the message, unlike the clarity of communication with the abstract expressionistic combinations.

Although a bit uneven, *Meltd Vibrancy* successfully engages the viewer and promotes a positive artistic experience.

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