



Paper Ships

SURFACE TREATMENT

Donald Lyles

Where: Art Gallery, UTRGV Visual Arts Building, 2412 US-281
Bus., Edinburg

When: no longer on display

Contact: Ma. Elena Macias at 956-665-3480

Intellectual Pursuit

Only displayed briefly, this exhibit offered a worthwhile experience

As is often the case in the work of Donald Lyles (previously known as Jerry), it's difficult to know if there is too much thought going on or not enough. His latest exhibit, *Donald Lyles*, displayed at the UTRGV School of Art, is no exception. The show consisted of three paintings, including a very large scale diptych, and a series of small pen and ink drawings reflecting a comic strip format.

The focus of the exhibit concerned the influence on the artist from adventure comics, particularly the Jack Kirby and Stan Lee variety. Lyles extracted the form of popular sequential illustration in which these artists worked, and transplanted it into his own contemporary art approach. Comic books, a sequential art form, are typically graphic stories with text and images, using panels to represent time passages. Lyles departed from this concept in his shift of the form. In his drawings, narrative panels suggested a range of narrative possibilities, but he never took the viewer/reader in a specific direction. Rather, his objects in the narrative became still life drawings, bereft of any plot. Lyles explained his divergence: "Unlike sequential illustration, the engine propelling art is often ambiguity, and for me," he continued, "content (meaning) behind a work emerges while I'm working on something. I don't always have the specific idea in mind at the beginning." And as his imagery progresses, he slowly understands the relationship of its different elements. The combination of sequential

narrative with his own tightly contained painting methodology created a dynamic disconnect. Lyles' content in this current work may be the disconnect of the two forms.

Specific techniques reflected specific influences. The line drawings assumed the role of disconnected inked panels that may or may not suggest a narrative. The general theme of the ink drawings, "The Monster at the Train Station," offer panel variations, but there was never a continuous train of thought. This is Lyles' disconnect between sequential illustration and fine art. The large oil painting, "Paper Ships," demonstrated chromatics involved in consolidating the art forms, with a color palette inspired by Jack Kirby. Two sequential panels became a diptych depicting Lyle's favorite subjects, comfortably embracing the rich warm-cool color contrasts that have always engaged his viewers. "Suburban Morning" was a mélange of toys and objects where we were shown Lyles as a Smurf, painting a landscape within this fairytale-like environment.

Lyles approach to this body of work mirrored academic research where a hypothesis is offered and a conclusion is reached. While Lyles ideas may be either over-intellectualized or under-thought, the skill he employs in his works is without question. At the end of his gallery talk Lyles said, "What I found with this entire show was that so much of the work that I was doing was influenced by love and gratitude for the influences on my thinking, on the way I handle image making, and the professional references." He even expressed gratitude to Peter Larsen, the guy who brought Sue the tyrannosaurus to the UTRGV Visitors Center where Lyles spent hours drawing every bone. Maybe this was all we really needed to know.

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