



*Nostalgic Landscape*

## SURFACE TREATMENT

What: Gabriel Salazar Paintings  
Where: McAllen Heritage Center, 301 Main Street  
When: Through early 2017. Hours Wed-Fri, 1-5pm; Sat 11am-4pm  
Contact: (956) 687-1904  
Free admission; donations are encouraged.

### **Imagined Nostalgia**

After the stress and hassles of this year's ever manic holiday season, Gabriel Salazar's landscape paintings offer an appreciated respite. A small selection of his work is currently on display in the Artist Corner section at the McAllen Heritage Center. Inspired by the unique panoramas offered in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Salazar imagines the Valley as it was before modern development took over. Often referred to as a painter of nostalgia, Salazar paints what the Valley used to be and in some areas still is, open fields and orchards with partially clouded blue valley skies. His paintings are not titled, but rather numbered.

To produce his works, Salazar projects himself back to an earlier time in Valley history, when he captures the serenity and simplicity of unspoiled nature and rural life through an idyllic vision. These qualities are magnified by his artistic technique. Although his paintings are on a smaller scale when compared to such 19<sup>th</sup> century painters as Albert Bierstadt and Thomas Cole, whose aesthetic he continues, the spatial vastness that he captures continues their vision of panoramic scenic painting. Salazar's landscapes are characterized not by the drama of nature, but rather by its stillness; rural life as it plays out in his scenario is characterized by the same qualities. His simple cabin in

painting #3, a single room structure set beneath mature trees, appears to the contemporary viewer as a respite from the complexities of the modern world.

Typically, his vistas fade into hazy perspective as he leads us into their distance, creating a sense of expanse. Although many of his agricultural landscapes depict cultivated fields edged with palm trees, such as his painting #4, he persuades us to accept them as pristine landscapes. His palette is subdued, relying on neutrals with just enough contrast to keep the vistas alive. His use of blue in water and sky is always tempered - his light blue skies are usually friendly and non-threatening. River water, resacas, and ponds run still, with even the small water flow in painting #6 taking on a frozen quality. Closer observation to this painting, however, denies the typical calm and instead reveals that much is still happening within nature's domain. The landscape on either side of the water forms the illusion of crocodiles moving into the placid stream. The movement of the water flow is suggested by careful tone changes that move the viewer's eye from foreground to its conclusion. Salazar establishes balance and subtle relationships between the land and his skies; the clouds in this painting reflect the shapes of the trees, and there is a palpable relationship between the two phenomena.

Salazar is a self-taught artist who has been painting for over 30 years. A Rio Grande Valley native, his inspiration is his home environment. "Once I have an idea, I place myself in it, as if I'm there," said Salazar. "I imagine it, a landscape situation, and I live what I paint."

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