



First Things First

SURFACE TREATMENT

Izel Vargas: Secret Objectives

Where: STC VAM Art Gallery, Bldg. B-103, Pecan Street campus

When: Through Nov 17, 2017

Artist's Reception and art talk Nov 16, 6-8pm

Hours: 8am-3pm Tues, Wed, Thurs

Contact: artgallery@southtexascollege.edu

Izelvargas.com

Mindscapes

Vargas is a master of imaging the indistinct and inviting the viewer to discover the storyline

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

Izel Vargas, a native of Alamo, returns to McAllen with a new exhibit of mixed media works. "Izel Vargas: Secret Objectives" reflect his experiences in the South and Southeast during the last five years mixed with earlier memories. It all inspires his process-focused art. "Secret Objectives" offers a higher level of sophistication than his previous McAllen exhibit. Vargas plays with subdued tones almost to the point of monochrome, and even though color appears in most of the works, it is restrained. A deep love of drawing is evidenced in his expression, with linear and tonal subtleties acting as conduits of aesthetic life in his compositions. Vargas states that his art is

heavily influenced by the culture of his birthplace, the Rio Grande Valley, yet the overall exhibition has broader overtones - acts of reverie sometimes eroded by the instability of time to which anyone can relate. Vargas is a master of imaging the indistinct, giving his work a fleeting time-is-in-motion experience unlike works by other artists who objectively reference the Valley. His art comes from a deeper place within himself.

The concept of recycled images is evident, but Vargas has reined in their importance in most of these works. His repurposed images mingle with his own painted/drawn imagery to form mindscapes that circle the edge of unstable time, as all of our memories tend to do. His frequent use of brushed, white washes of paint across the picture plane creates grounds that are at once bleak, poetic, and hazy; some images seem to struggle to attain remembrance, but ultimately are relinquished to the almost forgotten. Such is the case with "The Way Things Were", which includes a print of multiple mailboxes, a dangerous dog, and steps leading away. The isolated steps hang suspended in space, a small symbol of either escape or just moving on. They occur repeatedly throughout the show along with certain other symbols, such as the pink house. In "First Things First" the pink house is wrapped in the word, "siempre". Sketched architectural studies haltingly move in as though still forming the house, inviting the viewer to share the structural experience. Other renderings are fading into the background. A color chart, part of a kneeling child, and a woman watching over the scene - these are things of importance.

The color panels/charts also act as a repeated guide. While "Passage of Time" dutifully reflects the use of each color, not all the works are so reader friendly. It's as though the artist exposes the viewer to a change of plan. This work expresses one of the more distinct feelings of forgotten time; memory pops up in some places while remaining indistinct in others. There are images, but it's just so hard to get hold of some of them. Vargas' overall artistic vision is notable. His work expresses an obsession with the entire picture area in a very abstract sense; even simple backgrounds in these works have an emotional resonance that brings them to the front of our own minds.

Vargas received an MFA from the University of North Carolina and teaches at Florida Atlantic University. The public is invited to attend the reception and gallery talk with the artist on Thursday, November 16.

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