



*Nothing Could Stay*

## SURFACE TREATMENT

What: *Jerry Lyles: Mind-Scapes* exhibition  
Where: Lobby Gallery, McAllen Public Library, Nolana at 23<sup>rd</sup> Street  
When: Until August 29, 2016, Library hours

### **Quiet Narratives**

Jerry Lyles' lush and exuberant brush style echoes throughout both his still-life and landscape paintings in this exhibit, with his mental narratives creating some major inspirational differences along the way. Lyles, UTRGV Associate Professor of Art, brings *Mind-Scapes* to the McAllen Public Library's Lobby Gallery. This exhibit offers an engaging experience; large and commanding paintings co-exist with smaller works, both reflecting the artist's enthusiastic love of color. The smaller paintings read as perceptive sketches - attempting to catch the time of day before it evaporates under the South Texas sun. The larger paintings demonstrate a complete capture of sensate reality.

Entering the exhibit through the main door, the mesquite paintings offer a dramatic introduction to this show. Lyles has focused on the wild and complicated cross patterns of the bare winter mesquite tree branches. A seemingly dead subject, he has brought the barren limbs back to life with a vengeance. Amid their tangle in "Suburban Mesquite," the warm reddish sunlight becomes visible heat, igniting the trees against bright blue skies. Green shrubbery adds further chromatic richness. "I'm interested in trying to demonstrate to our local residents the value and the beauty that's around them," professed Lyles about his landscape choices. "There are some really interesting corners that people miss and I'm trying to take them there." Another painting brings both the hot reds of the sun and the fugitive sky blues into the trunk of a single tree, creating a stunning analogy of the interdependence of natural elements.

While we also see dramatic color plays in the still-life paintings, a different narrative level quietly emerges. "Existential Pumpkin" takes us on a colorful journey exploring the importance of objects and what might be their alter egos. The right side of this diptych portrays two robust pumpkins along with some smaller gourds. Tiny dinosaurs and exaggerated exoskeletons of cicada are measured against the pumpkins. With the tiny dinosaurs, the pumpkins seem huge, but against the cicadas, not so much. Two garishly

painted jack-o-lanterns in the left panel take us into an uneasy place. A faulty registration appears between the two panels and creates further questions about scale. A Jekyll and Hyde feeling permeates this work.

The still-life painting, "The Moon Came Down," continues with the same objects/characters, but the bottom side of a gourd has taken on the identity of the moon over the laughing green jack-o-lantern. "That's Free-formed thought," he said. "I'm looking at objects and at times the objects suggest something else to me. So I just respond to that. I'll play with changing a form into something else, handling the paint a different way. By not being faithful to the actual scale, the painting functions in a more interesting way." In these paintings, Lyles gives power to certain objects and takes power away from others creating a surprising tension among the objects.

In all of Lyles' paintings, an undercurrent of possible menace exists. The viewer may choose to segue into the psychic disturbance, or be content with the beautifully light-kissed, in love with color, painterly surfaces.

*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)*