



Bird Man by Joe Barrington

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: *Messengers and Other Objects/Sculpture* by Joe Barrington
Where: Beyond Arts Gallery, 114 North A Street, Harlingen
When: Through July 1.
Hours : 1pm-5pm Wed-Fri, 10am -5pm Sat
Contact: (956) 230-2859

Finding Meaning in Metal BY NANCY MOYER SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

West Texas inspirations dominate this exhibit of welded metal

Joe Barrington's sculpture is informed by his West Texas heritage. His grandfather brought the first arc welder to the Throckmorton area, and the artist grew up under the influence of skilled craftsmen. And while animals and other images that are native to that area have been an obvious inspiration, ravens have also been seductive subjects. Those birds have served as messengers for different cultures across the millenia, representing creation, warnings, and sometimes the human soul itself. Barrington taps into this mythology with his exhibit, *Messengers and Other Objects/Sculpture*, currently on display at Beyond Arts Gallery. The exhibit boasts a positive vibe with floor sculptures, pedestal sculpture, and wall pieces. A mix of recent and older works, the sculptures are all

metal, either hand-formed, hammered, or manually shape-manipulated; the ravens, cacti, Texas creatures, and human characters fill Barrington's artistic landscape. However, there are noticeable thematic skips and hops. "They're not all suppose to fit together in a cohesive unit," Barrington stated in his defense. "There are different timelines; I think if your work doesn't keep changing there's something wrong with you. If you line all my work up from the last forty years, there's a progression; you can see how it got from there to here. But a show like this – it does seem to jump around." The relationship of surface texture to subject determines the character of these works, and offer bold points of aesthetic interest. There are also ambiguous surfaces that defy identification, such as that found in "Birdman". Here, Barrington has carved into solid steel with a torch, then polished it back, creating a fabricated form that has the solid appearance of a cast piece.

Social observations and man's relationship to the environment have ignited the artist's interest in repurposing materials. In the past few years, Barrington says that becoming more environmentally conscious has impacted his work. The materials he uses are mostly reclaimed, such as in his "Texas Flora" sculptures. "I seek those materials out," said Barrington. "The cactuses are made out of old reclaimed oilfield paint material; it's rough on the inside because it's been exposed to saltwater and whatever." A painted polychrome addition to the sculpture's surface enhances the burst of the joyous cactus flower. The raven images also figure predominately into this environmental view. A recent work, "Raven Seeking the 3rd Dimension" exemplifies a recent spiritual direction. "The ravens in the past few years have become a really predominant image for meaning in my work," he exclaimed. "I consider them to be messengers, like the Native Americans considered the raven to be a messenger. Some of my larger pieces are ravens and they're about man's place in the environment." "Frenzied Raven" speaks of concern for our increased irresponsibility; spear-edged pieces of metal replacing feathers scream a warning to us. "Nailed Raven" is both humorous and ominous. Perched above our heads, this bird is weighted down and perhaps unable to fly with his feathers turned into tools of man-made construction. "I'm not a staunch environmentalist, Barrington added, "but on the other hand, I think we're really stupid."

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