



*Missing*

## SURFACE TREATMENT

What: *Julie Speed: Undertoad*  
Where: International Museum of Art & Science, 1900 Nolana  
When: Through Dec. 2. Hours: Tues.-Wed., 9am-3pm; Thurs., 9am-8pm, Fri., 9am-5pm; Sat. 10am-5pm; Sun., 1-5pm  
Contact: 956-682-0123 or [www.imasonline.org](http://www.imasonline.org). General admission is charged.

### **The Visual Undertow**

Each work is a discovery. This remarkable exhibit at IMAS, *Julie Speed: Undertoad*, affords viewers a similar state of mind experienced by the artist when creating these fascinating works of art. Poetically conceived and carefully crafted works of gouache, chine collé, and polymer gravure etching fill the Museum's Central Gallery. Speed is a Texas artist of national renown whose work reflects her personal concerns regarding the role of religion, isolation and longing, sexuality, sin, and guilt – many underlined with a sly and sometimes dark sense of humor. She also harbors a steadfast refusal to offer the viewer any tidy resolutions.

The works in this exhibit are exceptionally beautiful; Speed's use of chine collé is paired with her own gouache technique, which recalls a European 13<sup>th</sup> century style. Faces in her works harbor an androgynous contenance; all are imagined. Her compositions fast-forward by referencing Manet's abstract use of space - rooms and landscapes are visually constructed space-as-shapes that fit together like a careful puzzle.

For works incorporating Her chine collé technique, Speed uses parts of old damaged Japanese woodcuts and antique engravings. She begins by selecting shapes and pieces that might work well together, and then develops the total image from there, resulting

in a perfectly fused work of art. "Good Friday" combines parts of Japanese prints and Christian imagery. Drawn into the detail and beauty, we wonder what could it possibly mean? Speed offers us no assistance. She explains that she begins painting with no particular idea in mind and allows the painting to grow as she paints, never knowing what it will ultimately be, but guided by what "feels right." Although this approach is not unusual for drawing or oil painting, it is unexpected for an exacting medium such as gouache. However, the viewer is offered clues with a question and answer log on a gallery desk. It's very helpful.

Speed professes to have no social statements in mind at the onset of each work, but her deeper concerns are there in what might be considered an undertow of feelings and opinions. Beneath a beautiful or puzzling surface, there may be darkness. "Manners" shows a woman being forcibly held down by a sailor (military figure) and force-fed religious teachings. A bland, everyman-type figure ignores the violence. Beneath the beauty of patterns in "Missing," a sailor knots, and a bear roars; it is the realization of loss. The prints utilize a polymer gravure etching technique. The artist creates a drawing/collage, scans it into a digital file and prints it onto acetate. The printed acetate is used to create a contact exposure over a polymer plate. The print depicting an anguished man with a third eye holding the angriest rooster I have seen, "Man and his Cock," is a superb example of this technique.

The title, *Undertoad*, is a humorous take by Speed on a child's mishearing/misunderstanding of a warning, "Watch out for the undertow!" And in these works the warning is apt; that undertow will get you when you understand too close.

*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)*