



Corales Naranjas

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: *Preciosa Mandala Aqua Exhibition*
Where: Beyond Arts Gallery, 114 North A Street, Harlingen
When: Through April 23. Hours are Tues-Fri: 11am-7pm,
Sat: 10am -5pm
Contact: (956) 230-2859

The Healing Process

Leila Hernandez' *Preciosa Mandala Aqua Exhibition*, now on view at Beyond Arts Gallery, brings the Indian spiritual concept of the mandala into the Decorative Arts movement. Using embroidered pieces from ropas, thrift shops, and old stores, her intricate combinations of textiles, plastic, glass, wood, and metal objects are repurposed into intensely process-based artworks.

The word "mandala," from the Indian Sanskrit language, means "circle." This archetypal shape symbolizes qualities such as unity, wholeness, and perfection, with the center representing our awareness. A tradition of mandala making includes a square with four corner-gates containing the circle, a center point, radial balance, and is a focus for achieving spiritual balance. We see that pattern throughout the exhibit. For Hernandez, the mandala making has offered a self-healing path after a bitter career experience. "This work is having to do with changing the negative into positive," she explained. "I'm going through a transition in my life where I am using all the energy I have for something creative and beautiful." And, indeed, some of these works are stunning in their transformation. By evoking a meditative state when working on these pieces, she was able to maintain her concentration and stay calm, peaceful, and re-center herself.

This exhibit is part of a series based on the mythological four elements of life: earth, water, wind, and fire. The first part of this body of work focuses on water. "Most of the pieces here have to do with that," she stressed, "Some are red because they have to do with blood that gives us life." in some pieces she includes animals that are related to

water - flamingoes, alligators, elephants – and have survived although they have been savagely hunted down. As soothing as the process of mandala making is said to be, it was difficult for Hernandez to ignore manifestations of violence and injustice even though she sees those creatures as currently thriving. In the work, “Thirsty Elephants,” the trunks are raised upward to signify good fortune. The colors in her work are significant; the purple symbolizing life itself; blue expressing unfailing love and relaxation, while orange reinforces self-awareness.

Many smaller works seem like filler-art when compared to their larger counterparts, but the larger dramatic and visually arresting works easily compensate. A large mandala on the east wall of the gallery follows the traditional composition and appears to contain all the colors of the spectrum along with a breathtaking assortment of textures. Embellished with a strong light-dark contrast, it is quite beautiful. An interesting consideration of these compositions is the influence of Hernandez’ background in the field of graphic design. To her, the pieces of embroidery and various objects respond to the same aesthetic as the spacing of type. Think about this when you view her “Diamond Velvet Nature.”

“This is a journey for me through all the situations in which I have been,” Hernandez summarized. “I want to capture something that will make me stronger. Other than sulking in loss.”

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