



El Patas Rosas

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: *Los Meros Meros* by Jessie Burciaga
Where: Beyond Arts Gallery, 114 North A Street, Harlingen
When: Through January 20. Hours are Wed-Fri: 1pm-5pm,
Sat: 10am -5pm
Contact: (956) 230-2859

Characters

Jessie Burciaga's new exhibit at Beyond Arts Gallery gives a nod to iconic Chicano artist, Cesar Martinez, as large Chicano portraits by the younger student artist declare an unmistakable bond. *Los Meros Meros* presents works from the artist's Chingonadas series, which capture the subject's level of chignon (Nice, Cool, Great). It is the artist's intent to capture the soul of his border town, Brownsville, through portraits of people who many of us may consider mere citizens, but are actually unknown urban border town heroes. The series consists of paintings, woodblock prints, and combination works.

"Cesar Martinez is the one I looked up to when I started," said Burciaga. "I was referencing him, but now I'm moving away from him. I've added patterns in the backgrounds and I'm more into the patterns and the painting." The paintings in this exhibit demonstrate a lively

sensitivity of pattern play. The portrait, "Guey", employs two patterns that bounce off each other: the background displays the bolder one, while a smaller, brighter one serves as the subject's apparel. The background may remind some of us of a tablecloth, but Burciaga deftly removes that connotation. His skillful painting and symmetrical composition combine with the effect of the horizontal-vertical pattern, giving the subject psychological dominance. We are shown someone who could do anything. The patterns seem to evoke a sense of locale, but this was not Burciaga's intent. "I use the patterns because when I do the portrait," he explained, "it looks like more of an open space, as opposed to using just a flat color. It gives the figure a grander look."

Burciaga's dual use of the background pattern as both an eye-catching device and a reinforcement of the subject's personality is seen in "El Chingon". He uses the word, "chignon" to acclaim people in his paintings as great characters. The masked wrestler faces us, elbows slightly bent, echoing the background's diagonal pattern. Both are capable of squeezing an opponent. "El Chingon" differs from the other vertical formatted paintings both in the diagonal background pattern as well as its horizontal format.

Another direction found in these works is the technique of combining canvas woodblock prints on paintings as a subtle collage. The subject from the painting, "El Patas" is revisited in "El Patas Rosas", where the portrait was re-created as a woodblock print on canvas, then cut out and combined with a separate background painting. While "El Patas" depicts the subject as an authoritative individual, the combination technique in "El Patas Rosas" with the striped background establishes a feeling of absolute authority. Although Burciaga likes printmaking, he doesn't like its monochromatic limitations.

Burciaga intends to continue the combination of painting and printmaking, and is planning a larger showing of his work in the near future. For McAllen art lovers, he is scheduled to exhibit works at the STC Library Gallery this spring. If you are unable to visit *Los Meros Meros* at Beyond Arts, make a note to catch his work later on in McAllen.

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