



Wave

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: "Awareness" MFA Exhibit by Lourdes Ballard
Where: Visual Arts Gallery, UTRGV School of Art, 2412 S. Closner, Edinburg
When: Through Nov 1, 2017
Hours: 9am–5 pm weekdays
Contact: Ma. Elena Macias at 956-665-3480

The Atmosphere of Awareness

This UTRGV MFA candidate visualizes the spiritual energy around us

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

Master of Fine Arts programs are opportunities for art students to build on their undergraduate learnings, explore and experiment with materials and ideas, and develop a personal style or "brand" to launch into the competitive art world. The exhibit demonstrates to the faculty the student's achievements, and can produce exciting exhibition experiences. Lourdes Ballard's MFA exhibition, "Awareness," is currently on display at the UTRGV Visual Arts Gallery with paintings and collages. This artist opts for a gentle direction.

MFA exhibitions involve a theme approved by the student's MFA committee, work produced relating to that theme, and a maximum of two different art forms. In Ballard's exhibition, "Awareness", the thematic unifier describes a heightened mental state, suggesting a higher level of perception than is actually observed by the viewer. Her artist's statement speaks of spiritual

forces and it is these that signify her awareness. Her earlier abstract paintings establish a symbol for the concept, which repeats throughout her work. "I am representing these spiritual forces with swirling patterns in my paintings," Ballard stated. "Many things in nature have the same pattern, which we can observe in leaves like the Rex Begonia and hurricane Harvey. The pattern repeats itself from the macro shape of the milky Way to our very own DNA." The swirling patterns successfully unify the paintings, but in doing so, limit the interpretive quality of awareness.

While the earlier abstract swirl paintings emit power, they are ultimately designated a background role in the exhibit, serving as an atmospheric device. The paintings from 2017 filling the rear wall establish the show's main direction. These paintings and subsequent collage and watercolor works place and superimpose figures against the background swirls, suggesting spiritual states of mind of the depicted figures through color. The oil painting, "Harken", presents a young person tending the earth, stopping for a moment to hear the presence of nature. "Wave" uses the swirls to express the sociable energy released through a friendly greeting. Several collage works are concerned with the positive dynamic of social groups.

These art works would be more interesting if the energy swirls and the figures had been more imaginatively integrated. Rather than taking any compositional chances with the concept, Ballard frequently chose a simple solution of combination. "Detachment I" comes the closest to successful integration; the background and women's clothing interact with impressive intensity, producing a dynamic aesthetic. However, their faces remain swirl-free as they do in all Ballard's works except the small "Youth Portrait" series. This could be read as part of the detachment were it not also evident in works with different emotional/spiritual tones. Ballard believes that people are spiritual beings having a physical experience; invisible forces that we can feel permeate us. That said, then why aren't the swirls of spiritual energy integrated into the faces and bodies of her figures? The flesh areas in the large paintings and collages seem separate from the spiritual ambiance that surrounds them, contradicting the artist's vision. "Youth Portrait" paintings demonstrate an unsuccessful attempt at this integration and apparently stopped there. It will be interesting to see further development of this artist's paintings.

"Awareness" by Lourdes Ballard will only be up another day and offers a pleasant experience for the general public.

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