



Tower of Babel

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: *Babel: an artist's exploration of communication* by Marilyn Carren
Where: Visual Arts Gallery, UTRGV Art Department, 2812 S. Clossner, Edinburg
When: Through Sept 22. Hours: 9am–5 pm weekdays
Info: (956)665-3480

About Communicating

What an epiphany! In this first exhilarating exhibit of the fall season, Marilyn Carren, UTRGV Art Lecturer, considers the teleportation of our words and images through the electronic highways and byways. Carren persuades us to look closely at electronic communication through photographs, sculpture, and computers. This thought-provoking exhibit, *Babel: an artist's exploration of communication*, is currently on display in the Visual Arts Gallery at UTRGV's School of Art.

Transmitted communication is something that most of us take for granted without question, but Carren questions our blind acceptance. What triggered her investigation into the general messiness of communication? During a conversation with her mother on Skype, Carren began photographing the screen. "I noticed in these images that she was in two places at once and I considered that I was time traveling," she exclaimed. "How fast did I take these? 1/160th of a second? And she's moving through the communication networks - like the Talking Heads!" In the photograph, "Skype Time," Carren's mother's image is captured as it segues from one point of time to another. We see her face, parts of her space-time-processed face, and the texture of the electronic

energy as it makes itself visible in its struggle to complete the transmission. This is a significant image.

Her “Tower of Babel” title piece is a large techno-art creature made up of many old communication devices - Carren considers Babel a very prescient metaphor for what’s going on today. “We have more and more communication tools,” she commented, “but less and less communication.” A wonderful ceiling mural, “Coaxial Michelangelo” combines an image of the popular art masterpiece with coaxial cables that mimic Michelangelo’s touch of divine life. “If you don’t have that connection, you don’t have the gift of life in today’s society,” continued Carren. The exhibit offered an immediate experience with problematic communication systems; interactive laptop Q & A was possible during the opening reception. On one monitor the answer was in the form of dance, on the other it was with signs.

Located on two gallery walls are images of historic communication devices titled “Objects of Propaganda,” recalling past attempts at social connecting. These objects have been used to give us things like movie stills and sound TVs; old telephones, cameras, microphones and such remind us of the not-so-good old days. “These are all Google Fair Use labeled for reuse images,” Carren pointed out. With this portion of the show, she wants to force a conversation with art students about the use of online images, because students are not always sure about what fair use is. The online-sourced images have been given an enhanced photographic presence through traditional photo processing.

“Communication is a magical, messy, imprecise and critical part of being human,” concluded Carren. “The changes in the way we have been communicating morph and reinvent themselves at breakneck speed, and culturally and intellectually we are at the mercy of these technologies. I think the power structures are trying to keep us bamboozled with all this entertainment/communication.”

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