



Acceptance and Appreciation by Josie Del Castillo

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: *Mirrors: A Solo Exhibition by Josie Del Castillo*
Where: Beyond Arts Gallery, 114 North A Street, Harlingen
When: Through July 22
Hours: 1-5pm Wed-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat
Contact: (956) 230-2859

More than Appearance

This artist goes beyond simple appearance with contemporary portraiture.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

Brownsville seems to be a city that nurtures the human figure in art. Beyond Arts Gallery's new exhibit, *Mirrors: A Solo Exhibition by Josie Del Castillo*, fills its small gallery with a series of paintings depicting her peers. Unlike the portraits by Jesse Burciaga, whose portraits are about everyday heroes in Brownsville, Del Castillo focuses instead on her friends and family. She has yet to branch out into the world away from her own; the richness found close at home still feeds her artistic needs.

Del Castillo's interest in portraiture was formed by how she might go further with that art form, while still maintaining a realistic appearance of her subject. At this stage of her exploration, background treatments hold a key. In the portrait, "The Beauty of Depression," the subject frames her face with hands that appear oversized. This is a strong, yet conflicted woman; we see her fragility through the attachment of dried flowers to the painting. Her blue lipstick and nail polish are trendy, yet her dress seems very conventional. Del Castillo enjoys painting on wood panels and here, she emphasizes the wood grain as a background pattern of constant flow. The woman in the painting is part of that flow on her way to attaining permanency.

Capturing this concept of personal flux in the subject is also seen in other works, and establishes Del Castillo's portraits as perceptive interpretations of her sitters. "We are Always Changing" shows a young man in process. Different levels of his being lack alignment with others as though trying to determine where they should be at any given time. Bits of pixelated strips – the kind we see on our TV monitors when a transmission is disrupted - appear randomly, as they constantly shift and readjust to a changing reality.

Her own photographs are used as resources for the paintings. "I take pictures of myself and people that I know," she explained about her process. "I take five or ten pictures of each one and choose the best one, and I use that as reference." She has photography studies in her background and several of her gelatin silver prints are on display, along with a digital portrait of her boyfriend. With "Overflow of Emotions," she added digital enhancement techniques, delving into the connection between artist and subject.

Del Castillo's background blends two diverse cultures, Mexico and the United States. She says that the social and political instability in both countries has found its way into her work, and we can see the uneasy undercurrent in these works. Anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem are dark currents that she deals with and expresses in her work. Although her artistic goal is to capture the essence of the person she paints, her own concerns have found their way into the paint. Having achieved a BA from UTRGV (Brownsville), she is currently enrolled in the MFA program, and as an emerging artist, her work is still developing. A recent work that reflects this personal development is the painting on shaped wood, "Stay True to Your Roots, but be Open-minded." It is a bit too literal, but the abandonment of the background support allows the portrait image to float freely; although she is not the subject, it certainly seems symbolic of the artist herself.

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