



*Tropical Blue*

## SURFACE TREATMENT

"Pu Chen: Organic Light"

Where: Lobby Gallery, McAllen Public Library, Nolana at 23<sup>rd</sup> Street

When: Until Mar 15, 2016

Hours: 9 am-9 pm Mon to Thurs; 9 am-6 pm Sat; 1-9 pm Sun

Contact: (956) 681-3000

### **Intimate Botanical Views**

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

Enjoy the photographer's love of botanicals through her works

Entering the McAllen Public Library's Lobby Gallery we are greeted with the full beauty of colorful botanical paintings and photographs. For her exhibit, *Pu Chen: Organic Light*, Chen has transferred her love affair with the exotic side of nature into vividly colorful personal experiences. Although the exhibit relies on photographs for the major portion of the show, there are four paintings that both blend and contrast with the overall theme; the stylistic photorealism blends in with the photos, while the paint offers contrast of form. Chen experiments with not only different papers, but also canvas and metal. Through her lens, these plants are born again on Chen's printed surfaces.

Her photorealistic approach to painting is in sync with her photographs and it is sometimes necessary to read the title tag in order to distinguish the art form. Interestingly, there is one subject that appears as a photo as well as a painting: "Serenity (Blue Water Lily)" and "Tropical Blue". Which is the painting?

Chen brings an intimate relationship to her subject. Trained in the biological sciences, she developed an eye for close-up observation;

while working at the Huntington Library in California, she used that ability to personally photograph their renown botanical gardens. Already enamored of orchids, she considered the garden's collection of desert plants also to be exotic. Her newfound interest led her into learning more about them - discovering their secrets, so to speak. Many of the plants that she photographed became personalized through this discovery process. "Almost There" catches a poppy in the process of opening into its future bloom. Chen persuades the viewer to empathize with the life of this plant. The same holds true for "Wise Man", an insect-eating Venus slipper. "I really get into a lot of these plants," she confessed.

Other images are breathtakingly beautiful in their purely botanical existence. "Zoom" rushes us into the center of a passion flower where Chen has created an exhilarating photographic dynamic with sharp focus in the center and near edges. She also offers us a fun fact: Christian missionaries discovered these flowers in the 1500s and named it for the Passion of Jesus because of its unique structure.

The paintings embrace the personal directions found in the photos. "First Kiss" has us instantly accepting the unlikely relationship between an aloe flower and bananas, while "Serenity (Blue Water Lily)" confronts us with the dynamics of color. Chen traveled the world as a photographer for quite awhile before learning to paint. She says that painting helps her explore the interaction of color and light and enables her to fine tune her thoughts through her brushwork. "I would like to do more painting," she averred. "Of course, photography you can do anytime and I'm constantly doing it." Because of the longer time necessary for her painted works, she tends to produce less. "I plan to do a lot more painting when I have time," she continued. "Painting can achieve an idealization of photography, while photography provides endless possibilities to fulfill in paint."

*Nancy Moyer, Professor Emerita of Art, UTRGV, is an art critic for The Monitor. She may be reached at [nmoyer@rgv.rr.com](mailto:nmoyer@rgv.rr.com)*