



*Esperanza*

## SURFACE TREATMENT

What: *Subjective Engineering* by Lenard Brown  
Where: Beyond Arts Gallery, 114 North A Street, Harlingen  
When: Through Jan. 6. Hours are Wed-Fri: 1pm-5pm,  
Sat: 10am -5pm  
Contact: (956) 230-2859

### **Recalling Underground Railroads**

*Subjective Engineering*, currently on display at Beyond Arts Gallery, is a must see. In his latest exhibit, Lenard Brown, Visual Arts Faculty at TAMUK, presents photogravure prints, photo-transfer and collage works, and graphite drawings that are about people who have had a migration experience, but are not necessarily newcomers to their present place. This art is about those who have become established in a community through a migration journey. Brown has a deep interest in the human pathways of history and he brings it audaciously into his art, exploring history in both his content and his techniques.

Deeply interested in historical and contemporary migrations, Brown has a cerebral connection with the Underground Railroad. Some of it is the African American experience, and some references the southern border immigration experience. In both instances, he looks at people who are becoming, or who became, less transient. Referencing one of his prints, Brown explained, "This woman was from Monterrey originally, but as a child her family immigrated to the United States, so she grew up here, but now she lives in New Orleans. A lot of the models in my pictures have an interesting story; some of them are first generation Americans. Things of that nature."

A majority of the works in the show are photo-transfer and collage prints from Brown's migration series, insightful fusions of contemporary history and personal memories. By printing on maps of relevant geographical areas, Brown created images combining travel, place, and persona in a way that evokes personal time passages in a condensed format. "Observation Point" shows a woman's face printed over a map depicting her journey; her expression suggests the contentment of security of place. The journey is part of her. But what impressed me about this fusion of subject and journey is the way in which the

map and subject are aesthetically combined. The placement of the face against the map supports the anatomical structure reinforcing personal wholeness.

Brown describes his graphite drawings as slightly washed, slightly airbrushed, and painted. They read like random memories of an open time-frame. Of interest is the ambiance achieved in “Celia” and “Anne Marie” that offer a sense of ongoing time.

The goal of creating continuous rich black tones in a photo-etched image is achieved with the artist’s photogravure prints, such as “The Dreamer”. Photogravure was a 19<sup>th</sup> century printing phenomenon that combined very early photo printing technology with the intaglio printmaking process. Briefly, using potassium dichromate in gelatin to capture a photo image, the image was transferred onto a metal plate that makes the etching of a continuous tone possible. The plate is then inked as an intaglio. Brown is replicating this process in order to produce large prints that would be extremely labor intensive by the etching process alone.

“I am a Subjective Engineer.” Brown proclaims. “A Subjective Engineer creates, defines, and maintains human culture by outlining all possible modes human expression. A Subjective Engineer makes art, lectures about art and teaches art.”

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