



Into the Opening

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: *Personal Topography* by Sylvia Benitez
Where: STC Library Art Gallery, Bldg. F, 3201 W. Pecan Blvd.
When: Through Dec.2, Mon-Thurs: 9am-10pm
Info: 956-872-3488 or <http://lag.southtexascollege.edu>

The Spiritual Landscape

Personal Topography by Sylvia Benitez presents landscape paintings that will draw you to them, and once there, will pull you into their dreamy space. The paintings evoke a spiritual beauty that induce an inner calm. *Personal Topography* is currently on display at the South Texas College upstairs Library Art Gallery.

A significant quality in Benitez' paintings is the ability to project her perception of open space. Although she trained as an abstract painter, she also pursues spatial considerations in sculptural works that are sometimes more space than mass. Seeming representational, but yet abstract, her landscapes evoke the openness of space while still anchoring it to the landscape below. Captured in her images is a sense of majestic space, restaging the Romantic mood of 19th century Hudson River School painting. In those earlier works, land and sky represented pristine America, devoid of man and his structures, and while Benitez' landscapes also have that purity of natural vision, her subsequent image is quite different. Rather than documenting the scene itself, she paints the memory of her felt experience without the aid of photographs or sketches.

Living in the Central part of the state, Benitez feels a personal relationship with Texas skies and when driving, she often stops by the side of the road to simply watch the sky, horizon, and lay of the land. At certain times of day, the ambiguity of place where sky and land meet - that mysterious edge that could be either - captivates her. "Into the Opening" reflects that experience. In this large work she leads us through an inlet into the vast sky beyond, eclipsing indistinct land shapes. "Different Hills" is composed of horizontal bands of color with no distinction between land and sky; either could begin or end in those ambiguous chromatic tiers. And while the upper strata of clouds would be

recognizable as such, a lower strata turns into pure abstraction; the paint strokes themselves speak of the energy and freedom of sky. "Orange Guadalupe" celebrates morning on the Guadalupe River near her home. The lower part of the canvas shows tree-like shapes and suggested land, the upper part is blue, and the central space glows with orange light infusing the edges of the trees. "It's that morning when you get that really bright pop of light and the sky is just becoming blue," said Benitez about her inspiration. "You get a merge of orange; you get it early in the morning and in late the evening, and the rest is my impression of the river and what it would feel like."

Benitez' artistic process is a spiritual one. "I recognized that the emotional space I occupy while painting is a connection to other world, other place, church under sky," she stated. "I understood that for me, the act of painting is a bridge; I view the paintings as tangible diaries, markers of my time with this connection to spirit and the world's splendor."

Personal Topography should not be missed. More of Sylvia Benitez' work may be viewed online at <http://www.sylviabenitezstudio.com/>

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