



*Ghost with Universe Hat*

## SURFACE TREATMENT

What: *Porziuncola* - Solo Art Exhibit by Thomas Murray  
Where: UVAL, Kika de la Garza Art Center, 921 E. 12th Street, Mission.  
When: Through Oct 3: Hours are Tues, Wed and Thurs from 10am to 6pm; Fri 10am-2pm; Saturday, 2-6pm.  
Contact: 956 583-ARTS

## Not

This is the largest exhibit of Thomas Murray's artwork that we've seen so far in the RGV and it remains true to the style of the artist's output: poetic and beautiful images undercoated with philosophical rationale. Most of Murray's paintings show lush combinations of nude figures engaging with exuberant plant life, with music often manifesting itself as shape on his painted surface. This exhibit, *Porziuncola*, currently on display at the Upper Valley Art League, was inspired by Murray's studies in Assisi and his subsequent visit to Porziuncola where St. Francis died in 1226. A sparse wood building symbolizing that church dominates one side of the gallery.

The Franciscan inspiration for the show was made visual to viewers through a drawing of knots; "Nots" became Murray's visual springboard. The three knots on St. Francis's cord represented his vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Murray's works become metaphors of this concept. "In this exhibition," explained Murray, "metaphor has at its core the value of negating. Something of a "Not-ness" experienced. Pictures and paintings mime space, and objects are celebrated as postcards of what not to do, what not to think, how not to be." And this is where the show becomes a

philosophical/religious/visual maze to be sifted through. "Nolo mi Tangere" is an easy place to start. An image of Mary Magdalene begs not to be tread upon. This painting also demonstrates Murray's skill at 3-D illusionism with one side of her face demonstrating a hyper-realistic technique. While many of his paintings embrace a softer style, I asked about this contrasting approach. "For the intensity. I wanted to show the intensity of her gaze," he replied. In the large painting, "The Not," male figures toss helplessly without direction in a tangle of Murray's musical/floral flourishes. Was this Murray's warning to himself? Losing his focus amid the seduction of the paint itself? Then it becomes a contradiction; it is a brilliantly communicated visual lesson. Nearby, a partially completed painting, "Untitled," speaks only of visual sound. There is also a series of small, altar-displayed and badly executed studies that line both sides of the area in front of the Porzuincola; these are ideas that Murray rejected. Are these stations?

Gorgeous works, the "Manuscripts," contain studies of faces, and are presented in book form on sumptuous sheets of hand-pulled papers. One of Murray's major strengths is the portrayal of the human face.

Murray described sitting in his studio in the early morning hours when his role of parenting was suspended, and contacting people in other time zones whose faces he could paint.

Information sheets are posted about his myriad thoughts in *Porziuncola*. Although they add to the understanding of the artist's intent, what is very clear when looking at any of Murray's works is that he is in love with the visceral experience of painting, and his immersion in the complete and joyful act of moving paint on the welcoming surface has the power to bring the viewer along with him.

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