



*Hen to Pan* by David Ransom

## SURFACE TREATMENT

What: *Works of Figuration* by Robert Andes and David Ransom  
Where: Beyond Arts Gallery, 114 North A Street, Harlingen  
When: Through March 5. Hours are Tues-Fri: 11am-7pm,  
Sat: 10am -5pm  
Contact: (956) 230-2859

### **A Figurative Dance**

This two-person exhibit featuring the paintings of Robert Andes and David Ransom appears to be a figurative dance in which the partners have a lot in common, but then again, maybe not. Their exhibit of oil paintings, *Works of Figuration*, currently on display at Beyond Arts Gallery, focuses on the human figure and family as subject.

Andes works are likable, compared to some of Ransom's. Both artists are realistic in their general style, but Andes sometimes employs an impressionistic technique with his brush applications, particularly his soft-focus backgrounds, while Ransom embraces the hard edges of Norwegian painter, Odd Nerdrum. Both artists engage the idea of family, but when we go deeper, the similarity ends.

There is an uncertain quality about the paintings by Andes although they appear lighthearted. Images of the family at the beach and the father and child sitting on the lawn are carefully woven with complex brushstrokes, using light and color to create shapes and provide emotional contrast. "I am particularly interested in color and its ability to communicate complex emotions without words," explained Andes. He demonstrates a fine sensitivity to his subject's mental states, but a psychological hesitancy also comes across. Andes' paintings are either of modest proportions, or the figures are small in proportional relationship to the picture plane, as though he is

helping his well-painted subjects conceal their secrets. He seems to hold them close, protective of their inner lives.

Ransom's paintings are more in-your-face. His New York painting studies gained direction during a year of European study with the Norwegian painter of kitsch, Nerdrum. Although we have come to associate the concept of kitsch with creative weakness and exaggerated sweetness, Nerdrum's kitsch is about the eternal human questions where feelings come first, such as yearnings, fears, hopes, and death - what it is to be human. This is partnered with a painting style informed by Rembrandt and other old masters. Ransom, like Nerdrum, believes Kitsch to be a valid descriptive term that deals sympathetically with the larger issues of life. "And I'm here to promote that idea," declared Ransom. "Promoting that philosophy is something I believe in; I will now and forever refer to myself as a kitsch painter." Ransom is also interested in alchemy, and believes the painter sublimates base materials, canvas and paint, into something greater than they were: art. His titles reinforce this in that they intensify the meaning of the image.

This kitsch philosophy is most evident in "Hen to Pan" by Ransom, where we respond to the child's emotional state prior to any appreciation of paint mastery. "Pater Familias," depicts his elderly father napping, allowing the viewer to directly engage with the man. In contrast, Andes' painting, "Father and Child," keeps feelings contained within the painting for the viewer to observe at a distance.

In the end, both artists come together in the felt message of their paintings. Both paint expressions of emotion, though not necessarily pleasant ones.

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