



Ranch Hands by Omar Gonzalez

SURFACE TREATMENT

2nd Annual Wild Horse Desert Print Fair & Exhibition

Where: Beyond Arts Gallery, 114 North A Street, Harlingen
When: Through September 2. Hours are Tues-Fri: 11am-7pm,
Sat: 10am -5pm
Contact: (956) 230-2859

Second Round

This is the second round of Jesus De La Rosa's curated *Wild Horse Desert Print Fair & Exhibition*. The *Print Fair* part occurred in early July, but thankfully, the exhibit continues for the rest of the summer. Located in the premier space at Beyond Arts Gallery, the major part of the show consists of large steamroller-pressed woodcut prints. Smaller prints demonstrating other printmaking techniques flank the opposing wall. Artists include university students and South Texas printmakers.

There are fine works on display. This well conceived event was designed as a means of popularizing the woodcut print to local viewers, and encouraging the collecting of reasonably priced and original works of art. Inspirational sources appeal to viewers with widely varied tastes: Riffs off well-known commercial poster designs are there, as are illustrations, western genre, Mexican American lore, historical figures, portraits, movie stars, metaphorical statements, and so on. Their common ground is that they are all original prints.

Certain artists, such as Omar Gonzalez, stand out as having exceptional skill with the genre. One of his prints, "Ranch Hands," is a warm human statement about South Texas generations. In this print Gonzalez demonstrates not only impressive drawing ability, but also a keen understanding of wood engraving, with effective tonal variations of light, dark, and middle tones through hatching and occasional cross-hatching techniques. A suggested gradient background effect is simple, but effective. Todd Lucas is another impressive printmaker showing several prints.

Creating the traditional woodcut requires preparing a wood block as a relief matrix where the 'white' areas are cut away with a knife or chisel. After applying ink to the uncut surface, the paper is firmly and evenly pressed against it, capturing the design as a mirror-image; this is tricky when text is involved. Using a relief surface for image making is an ancient technique. 3,000 years ago cylinder seals pressed into clay or wax were used for personal identification, and the Chinese used the technique to print on cloth before 220ce. In Western civilization, woodcut imagery was used to print the first book illustrations in Europe, ultimately gaining popularity as a distinct art form. In North America, pre-Columbian clay relief-carved blocks were used for printing textiles. After the Mexican revolution, Oregon's minister of Education and Art envisioned a people coming together and being educated through the arts, much as the country's indigenous ancestors had done - art was to belong to the people, not to the elite. Through their art production and teaching, artists were encouraged to define what it was to be Mexican; woodcut prints, easily accessible to the people, were part of a nationalistic plan. Celeste De Luna continues this definition of identity for our time and place with her woodcut, "Our Lady of the Checkpoint."

Referencing the Wild Horse Desert, which, historically, was the land between the Nueces and Rio Grande, Jesus De La Rosa wants to update this scenario. Rather than wild mustangs, he wants hand-pulled prints to metaphorically gallop across South Texas.

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