



Chapulines

SURFACE TREATMENT

Further Selections from the Great Mexican-American Songbook: Songs of Hope and Grief: Works by Paul Valadez

Where: Lobby Gallery, McAllen Public Library, Nolana at 23rd Street

When: Through June 4, 2017

Hours: 9am-9pm Monday to Thursday, 9am-6pm Friday and
Saturday, 1-9pm Sunday

Contact: (956) 681-3000

Cost: Free to the public

Remembering or Not

This artist continues to make us look at his work and think at the same time.

Paul Valadez' latest exhibit, *Further Selections from the Great Mexican-American Songbook: Songs of Hope and Grief*, fills the McAllen Public Library's Lobby Gallery. This is an image-packed collection of 34 collaged works created with old found-papers embellished by the artist. Remembering his grandfather's time and then forgetting it, Spanish as a secret language, uniting the American and Mexican cultures, and making images whose sole meaning must be provided by the viewer's own perception, are interwoven concepts here.

The key postulate in this body of work is the artist's remembrance from his childhood of a "secret language" in the house. As an English-speaking child in a bi-cultural family in San Francisco, one set of grandparents only spoke Spanish. And to Valadez, this was a secret language, so he overlays Spanish words on popular American images, echoing his family memories; the images recall the era of his grandfather. Also, by including the presence of Latinos and Mexicans into American history with a riff off the Great

American Songbook - The Great Mexican-American Songbook - he integrates the two cultures..

The collages are quite beautiful with early to mid-20th century popular ads and news items placed upon earlier covers of old music sheets, faded with time and sometimes in advanced states of age-disintegration. Against these inescapably narrative backgrounds, Valadez has added additional images and important-looking words, mostly Spanish, to create new ways of seeing the images. Although the words and images are allegedly unrelated, the viewer is placed in the artist's own metaphorical childhood shoes. We respond to each piece much as Valadez responded to his Spanish grandparent's conversation – we are baffled; Valadez brings us into his own experience of communication disconnection by obscuring specific meanings. Non-Spanish speakers are blocked by the meaning of the words, while Spanish speakers rush to understand the opaque connection between the image and the applied word. As was true with those long ago conversations, information is there if you can tune in.

“This work is more about forgetting than remembering,” Valadez insisted. “It’s more about having a laundry list of things that have been forgotten, even though it came out of something I was trying to remember about my anglo Grandfather. Instead, I thought about things that were forgotten.” About his images, he continued, “I don’t know who anyone is or what’s going on. I don’t remember where I’ve gotten any of this information; I’ve just put it all together for aesthetic purposes.”

Finally, Valadez wants this art to be a participation experience for the viewer rather than a declaration of his own inner thoughts and feelings. His random selection of words for each image? The words painted on each image are things that he likes to think about: food, slang terms, and words that he knows. “A lot of them I just like the way they look,” he added. He wants the viewers to complete the meaning in each work as they view it, and whatever pops into their heads, then that’s what he’s trying to do. “If I wanted to tell everyone exactly what I meant, I’d be a writer,” he muttered.

Nancy Moyer, Professor Emerita of Art, UTRGV, is an art critic for The Monitor. She may be reached at nmoyer@rgv.rr.com