

Review of *Mexico Illuminated/Iluminado*

The Freedman Gallery's Mexico Illuminated/ Iluminado at Albright College represents the nature of Mexican art. This is really a worthwhile exhibition. Before the exhibition began, there was a discussion with the Mexican artists, Laura Anderson-Barbata and Ruben Martinez, who have been displaying their masterpieces in the Freedman Gallery. There were artists Perla Krauze, Ray Smith, Luis Miguel Suro, Diego Toledo, Raymundo Sesma, Boris Viskin, Ruben Ortiz Torres, Abel Quezada , Laura Anderson Barbata, Enrique Ruiz, etc.

During the talk, Laura Anderson-Barbata presented a slide and discussed some of her work with us. Barbata's ten-year project involves the Yanomami community in making paper and prints as a way to preserve their own identity, language, and heritage through books. The Yanomami language is known as their greatest art, but many nuances are lost in translation to English. In creating simple printed images with paper made from local fibers (which is also used in the schools as there was no source of paper), Barbata has encouraged the peoples of Venezuela to preserve their own history. She showed how she did art not only for her own pleasure but also for the society, too. I admire her for the ways she contributes herself to others' communities. It was a good discussion because they gave me an idea of what the exhibition was going to be like and acquainted the audiences with the artists and what kind of messages they wanted to deliver to us.

When I first walked into the gallery, I felt completely strange. There were so many art work that I did not understand when I looked at them at the first moment. Seeing that most of the art work was conceptual art (art which emphasizes the idea over the product), I had to observe them for a longer time in order to get the inner meanings of the artwork. Therefore, I did use up a lot of my brain's energy because of the thinking. I think most of the artwork generally was about social issues. The artists think they can change the world for better through the power in art. There are some paintings I like

the most, which are *Mademoiselle of the Revolution Avenue* (1991) by Oleo Sobre Macopan, *Bart Sanchez* (1991) by Ruben Ortiz Torres and *A las Cinco de la Tarde* by Abel Quezada.

For the painting *Mademoiselle of the Revolution Avenue* by Oleo Sobre Macopan, we can clearly see that there is a face of a woman. It seems like a portrait of a person, although the painter used the style of Picasso. The distribution of visual weight within the composition of the subject is symmetrical, which makes it balanced. Obviously, it is an expressive and abstract painting. The woman is wearing a necklace with a black cross around her neck. She looks like a model. Seeing that the title of the painting is *Mademoiselle*, I know that this title is used for a woman who is not married, especially young one, and it is usually used as miss. Therefore, this woman is truly a young lady. Furthermore, the artist used a nice combination of intermediate colors such as brown with a reddish tint to present her hair and the clothes she is wearing. They all balanced well. And it is kind of a Picasso's style too. I was amazed by the high chroma colors the artist combined together in the painting, which creates a rich content for this painting.

In the painting *Bart Sanchez* by Ruben Ortiz Torres, the painting embodies the painter's conceptual explorations into cultural mixes of a both comical and ironic nature. The subject of the painting imitates Bart Simpson (the cartoon character), although with his eyes and hands twisted. It is a nice figure painting though. There seems to be no negative space in the painting, but it seems not quite symmetrical. While there is a cactus-like plant on the left side of the painting, it leaves a blank on the left side. It is quite interesting with the fact that I know the work was done by a Mexican painter because of the brown hat Simpson is wearing, the clothes he is in and the cactus. Therefore, the artist is trying to tell the people a message. Torres has a skillful blending of artistic technique. His figurative work was created with combining pictorial expressions of the cartoon character. The colors such as light violet, yellow, blue, black, white and brown in the painting balanced well. Although there are a lot of colors in the painting, I did not have the feeling of rainbow "puke" because the artist emphasizes on some of the colors such as yellow (one of the primary colors) by having more areas in it. The high chroma of the green cactus reflects the high chroma of the

brown hat, which means they have the same values even though they are not in the same colors. The background pink really goes well with Simpson's figure. The artist also added blue on Simpson's shirt to get a cooler hue.

Abel Quezada's paintings and work on paper juxtapose exquisite examples of commercial design and art, such as *A las Cinco de la Tarde*. It is lovely and interesting and it really caught my eyes when I walked past the paintings. It is no surprise that I could stand there observing the beautiful painting for a long time. It is a painting with a landscape above, tea pot and cup below. They were both on a wooden board. For the tea pot and cup, their shapes were cut out of the wood. I was amazed when I stepped further away; the tea pot and cup were like popped out of the deep brown wood. They then became the focal point. I realized that this cutting effect turns out to be quite useful. Feeling that there might be a relationship between the designs of art and nature, I was inspired by the artist. Quezada has a unique kind of technique and way to express art. I think what Quezada wanted to express is his great feelings of the landscapes (nature) he drew, and with the tea pot (design of art). By imposing the structure well on the natural world, it seems to be a good idea of relating them to landscape. He created the soft and quiet scene of the landscape by blending the light blue for the sky and the green for the field nicely. Then all of a sudden, my eyes were drawn to the bottom. The silver tea pot and cup are like crashing the harmony of the upper nice peaceful place. And they seemed to be the focal point of the art work.

It was hard for me to try to understand what the artists wanted to express in their paintings. Since they were almost in an abstract form, I always doubt if I really can get what the artists really mean. For the first painting I mentioned above, I think the artist is trying to tell me how the young woman feels by creating the warm colors in the painting. She feels happy and peaceful. For the second painting, I think he wants us to know that Bart Simpson is too old nowadays, and he deserves a change. Therefore, the artist just painted his eyes in a diagonal direction and the mouth was almost disappeared. For the last painting, I think it is trying to tell us that humans have come to this place to live. There is going to be noise. It mainly is about a nice blue sky and the crops field, too. He presents the nature well to people like me who are not always in touch with or are not born in a natural environment but a crowded city. Therefore, he gives me an idea of the natural beauty of the "original" world. As the world rapidly modernizes,

the pressure on individuals to adapt to a changing environment has resulted in people either selectively shielding themselves from the changes, or giving in. Quezada brings to life ordinary concerns as individuals try to comprehend and reconstruct the roles amid the confusion of city life.