

In the galleries: A D.C.-Madrid ‘conversation’ between artists, two shows infused with color and light, and Persian perspectives

By **Mark Jenkins**

Feb. 7, 2020 at 8:15 a.m. EST

Historically, artists have stood alone or been grouped — not always with their consent — as members of movements. But in this globalized age, there’s a vogue for dialogue, whether across oceans, cultures or eras. Thus “Feedback,” which began at La Tabacalera de Lavapies, a Madrid art center housed in a former tobacco factory. The project culminates at a modest Brookland storefront with a grand name, the American Poetry Museum.

The show comprises 10 colorful, intricate works by Spanish artists, paired in “conversation” with 10 responses from Washington counterparts. Hung by clothes pins, the artworks are mostly small-scale paintings and prints, sometimes with elements of collage or embroidery. A few of the Madrid contributions, such as Luz Fumaneri’s elegant “Trans-Flora,” demonstrate classical training. So does Guillermo J Bueno’s “La Cyborg del Armino,” but with the eerie addition of a robotic woman. In these pieces, the chatter is among past, present and future.

Other communiques from Madrid take a more urgent approach, drawing from graffiti, street murals and poster art. “Piscis Full Moon,” credited to enllama, fixes a tiny black origami fish atop a spray-painted orange orb. Julio Cubillos’s silk-screened “Fake Love” splashes the English word for “amor” in bright yellow above a swatch of black-and-white paisley and a bit of a paper ticket. Text is common if not always legible in these works, which include District artist Madison Bolls’s assemblage of torn book pages, set off by silver leaf and black and white paint.

The connection between Madrid statement and D.C. rejoinder isn’t always clear, although one stateside artist succeeds by skewing far from the original. In answer to B.E.R.’s expressionist woodcut of a glowering face, Annie Broderick constructed a “Gas Mask” from such materials as steel pipe and pantyhose. This mash-up of human and machine, as uncanny as Bueno’s cyborg, should yield an interesting comeback in the promised next phase of the ongoing D.C.-Madrid exchange.

Feedback Through Feb. 20 at the American Poetry Museum, 716 Monroe St. NE, Studio 25.

Theo Pinto

The intensely hued pictures at Calloway Fine Arts & Consulting are all encased in blond-wood boxes, as if they’re pools of liquid that artist Theo Pinto has somehow inhibited from cascading off the wall. The show is dubbed “Skyscapes,” a

title validated by the color schemes of most of the paintings. Yet such glistening confections as “Emerald Thoughts (study)” appear to be made of something heavier and more viscous than air.

The pictures’ seeming juiciness stems from the technique of the artist, who is Brazil-bred, Baltimore-schooled and Brooklyn-based. He glazes the picture plane with oil paints and resin so that the colors are subtly graduated but the surface uniformly gleaming. Most of the progressions are suitably sky-like: Orange to yellow to blue evokes sunrise, and a brown strip that yields to deep blue-blacks is midnight in a vertical rectangle. (All of the paintings employ this same format, save for one pink-becomes-yellow triangle.)

Pinto works as a designer of commercial displays, which may explain his clean lines and glossy finishes. There’s an urban quality to his style more akin to 1960s pop art than the rustic 19th-century Romantic tradition. Yet the artist is something of a transcendentalist: He depicts sky “not as an external image but as a shared moment,” according to the gallery’s note. Hard-edged yet richly layered, Pinto’s paintings open up space for communion with the viewer.

Theo Pinto: Skyscapes Calloway Fine Arts & Consulting, 1643 Wisconsin Ave. NW.

Tommy Bobo

Also suffused with light, Tommy Bobo’s installation at Hamiltonian Gallery is a spiritual journey that ends in near darkness. The show, with the grammatically unfortunate title “the distance between you and I,” was inspired by the D.C. artist’s attempts to help his young son understand religion. His own beliefs are “a hodge-podge of theologies and practices,” Bobo acknowledges in a statement.

Visitors to the gallery are greeted by four video portraits, looping on consecutive screens and lighted to suggest the faces are in a tunnel. The people portrayed embody religion as a social calling: Diane Randall, executive secretary of the Friends Committee on National Legislation; the Rev. Graylan Scott Hagler, a United Church of Christ minister; Stephen Donahoe, a Community of Christ lay minister; and artist-activist Bev Yockelson. They don’t speak, and the silence is filled by an electronic score by local composer Sam McCormally.

The chiming and droning soundtrack suits the main event — two clear, prefab greenhouses that contain fog machines and lights that, like the music, revolve and repeat. The effect is similar to that of previous Bobo light and video pieces, if a bit more solemn. The dark, foggy scene, the artist writes, represents how he experiences faith and God. Yet the light-houses can serve as metaphors for various barely perceived forces, and anyone who stands in the gloom is free to feel either lost or found.

Tommy Bobo: the distance between you and I Through Feb. 15 at Hamiltonian Gallery, 1353 U St. NW.

Once Upon a Journey

Classical Persian art is characterized by delicacy and finesse, both of which endure in the work of the seven Iran-born female artists who contributed to “Once Upon a Journey” at the District of Columbia Arts Center. There’s much calligraphy in the show, and traditional motifs are woven into pieces such as Parisa Faghieh’s black-and-white drawings. Yet the selection also includes the mostly metal sculpture of Mitra M. Lora, whose creations are both brazen

drawings. Yet the selection also includes the mostly metal sculpture of Mitra M. Lore, whose creations are both drawnly and refined. Her “Persian Garden,” a steel tree with glass baubles, spreads its boughs to reach the borders of a rectangular frame that makes the 3-D composition resemble a page from an illuminated manuscript.

The veil, an inevitable symbol for female artists from post-1979 Iran, appears in many forms and contexts. The participants collaborated on a dozen pieces, including photo collages that submerge women’s faces under various patterns and one that inscribes translucent fabric with lines from the 13th-century mystic poet Rumi. Roya Ansarian, the one of the seven who’s least likely to get a solo show in Tehran, photographs female nudes through curtains that only partly cloak them. What might seem discretion in another show here becomes an act of defiance.

Once Upon a Journey Through Feb. 16 at District of Columbia Arts Center, 2438 18th St. NW.
