

Contemporary Spanish art explored at Bayfront Plaza

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"Spanish Art Tomorrow," a collection of 98 works by 16 contemporary Spanish artists, displays an eclectic range of influences from French impressionism to photo realism to punk.

The rich, lavish use of color and sophisticated — sometimes erotic — subject matter of many of the pieces gives the show a distinctly European flavor.

Taking up most of the wall space in the lobby of the Bayfront Plaza Convention Center, the exhibit will continue through Nov. 11.

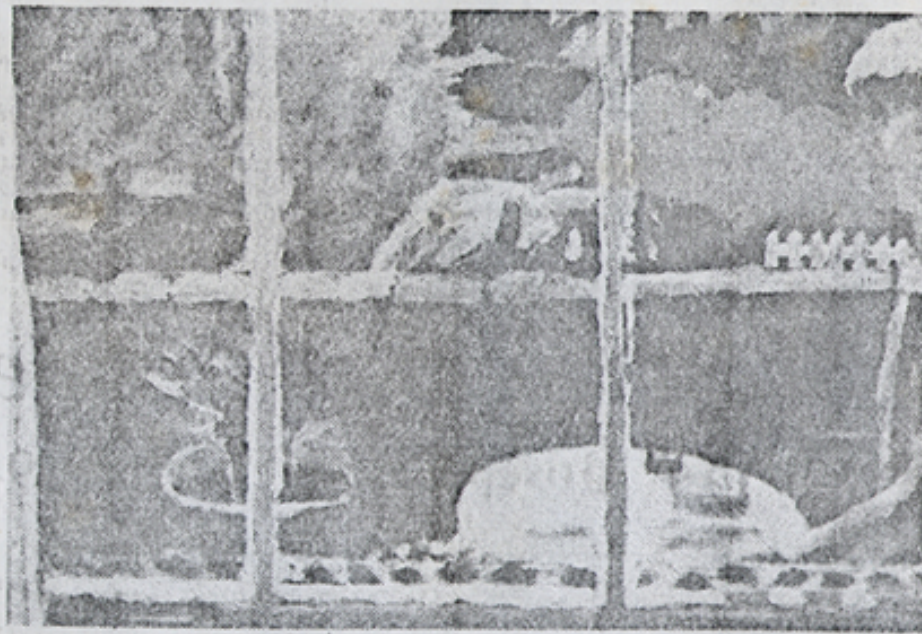
"Unusual" is probably too bland a word to use to describe the show. This is recent work (many of the paintings are only two or three years old) by young artists in their 30s or 40s who are not well-known outside the borders of Spain.

The influence of French and German painters is more prevalent than American artists of the New York School. Still, many of the pieces can be considered examples of abstract expressionism and color field painting, but with a warmer, more decorative Old World appeal.

The bulk of the work, however, is figurative with dashes of impressionism, surrealism, photo-realism and graphic design.

The most accessible and obviously American-influenced work are the photo-realistic street scenes by Jose Maria Cuasante. He is inspired by photographs of typical street scenes: a grocer unloading a fruit truck, workmen hitching a trailer to

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Antonio Posada's 'Dance Room,' far left. Juan Carceles' 'Alone With Silence,' in the center, Robert Ortuno's 'Painting V,' above, and, at immediate left, Jose Maria Cuasante's 'Unloading Vegetables,' display the variety of work gathered for 'Spanish Art Tomorrow.'

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Cuasante's 'Tourists in Paris'



Bartolozzi's 'Margodi Landscape'

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a jeep, a man sitting on a park bench in front of a customized car and tourists waiting on a corner.

The scenes have been blown up to mural size and reproduced on textured paper to convey the fuzzy, grainy quality of a slide projection. Cuasante's hot, vibrant colors and precise, highly-detailed drawing technique merge in warm, human celebrations of everyday life.

The American influence of the Chicago Hairy Who School and nihilistic punk art reverberate in the eerie, nightmarish paintings of Antonio Posada. Odd, almost cubist characters inhabit scenes which depict confrontations between disjointed men and elongated women in what appear to be gritty, urban settings. Razorback dog men run through scenes where women speak in lightning bolts and valentines. Odd stuff, indeed.

More European in outlook are the crowded, though inviting, studies of street life in Barcelona by Francesc Artigau. Children run through the streets, characters stand on the corner, a fat woman waits with shopping bag in hand and an artist painting a model can be seen through a half-open window in a series of almost architectural paintings.

The most controversial paintings are probably those by Rafael Bartolozzi who believes that experiments in a "neurotic field of painting" can lead to "a strange sort of sensation which evidently has no verbal and much less written explanation." There are strong sexual overtones in his paintings. "Self-Portrait, Undershirt, Garden" hints at a homosexual encounter while "Mallorca by Night" is a dark study of transvestism.

But "Mallorca by Night" is one of the strongest individual paintings in the exhibit. Deep blue and black tones convey a chilling sense of forbidden sexual pleasure in a storm-tossed nightscape.

Eduardo Arranz-Bravo works in a similar style, although his paintings are of a less overt sexual nature. Both artists have probably been influenced by the surrealist Hans Bellmer.

Clouds swirl around reclining nudes, children and priests in the paintings of Juan F. Carceles, which seem similar to illustrations found in fantasy magazines like "Heavy Metal." The impressionistic interior studies by Robert Ortuno are derivative of the French master, Pierre Bonnard.

Of the abstract painters, Esteban Tranche's work contains bright, elec-

tric colors rarely employed by American abstract artists. There are also figurative elements in the paintings such as "Individual and Bird" and "Aerial." "Nocturne" is one of the most striking works on display. Blues and dark blacks are contrasted with white, negative space in a compelling composition.

Miguel Ybanez and Enrique Brinkman work in abstract styles of a uniquely European style. Brinkman stretches his canvases over plywood, applies warm earth tones and varnish, then scratches and adds layers of paint to achieve plenty of "plastic impact." "Horned Individual" is particularly effective. Ybanez's paintings are montages of color, detail and motion.

Gerardo Delgado and Fernando Bermejo work with pleasing, decorative forms and colors in repetitive patterns. Rafael Baixeras offers whimsical, brightly colored studies of fish bowls and sailboats.

Fitting into no easy category are the tapestries and clay constructions of Frederic Amat, whose cylinders wrapped in material and mounted on poles look like ancient religious icons.

Rosa Torres is the only landscape artist represented. She uses broad brush strokes, bright colors and negative space to depict a fountain and plaza.

"Spanish Art Tomorrow" is an unusual show, not only for its content but in the way it came to Corpus Christi. The exhibit is being sponsored by Javier Jimenez-Ugarte, the consulate general of Spain in Houston and the City of Corpus Christi (which put up \$5,000 for security and handling).

It's strange that the city can find money to sponsor this show with little or no advance planning, but can't find funds to sponsor touring exhibitions and performances supported by the Texas Commission on the Arts Touring Program. Not that this show isn't worthy of support, but it underscores the haphazard funding practices of the Municipal Arts Commission.

Corpus Christi National Bank, H.E.B. and Whataburger are also helping to underwrite the exhibition.

The Bayfront Plaza Convention Center lobby is an adequate exhibition space for many kinds of art shows, although this exhibit makes use of every square inch of available space and the paintings are extremely cramped. Extra security will be needed to make sure no vandalism oc-

curs. Still, Corpus Christi is lucky to be the host for "Spanish Art Tomorrow." It provides a stimulating introduction to young, contemporary Spanish art-

ists whose influences are more Europe than New York.

The exhibit will be open to the public from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. seven days a week through Nov. 11.

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