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Undecided Review- Terri Thomas' "U-Genics"

Terri Thomas' "U-Genics" the unconventional (online exclusive)

Here we be in Austin, and here there be art. A two-perspective review on a new exhibition that shows women from, well... different perspectives.

Just looking around Austin, it is obvious that it is a city filled with much creativity, encompassing the many different perspectives and unique people who live here. On every street is the opportunity to witness this wealth of talent, especially through art. Austin is filled with galleries, art museums, craft vendors, and street art. This can be a little overwhelming to the student who is a novice to this art scene, so we have decided to offer an introduction to Austin art. Follow two staff writers as they enter the Austin art scene and share their experiences in the hope of helping other art amateurs become more knowledgeable.

Yasmin

Sitting on the bus, heading downtown on my way to the Volitant Gallery, I'll admit I began to feel a little nervous about reviewing an art show. I have no background in art history or studio art, so I in no way felt qualified to tell others what to think about Terri Thomas' "U-Genics" show. My co-reviewer, Bijal, had at least taken art history classes and could rely on her knowledge of how the masterpieces of our time were received by society. All I had was my high school's Art I class, in which I think learned about maybe two famous paintings the entire year.

So, when we finally arrived at the Volitant Gallery, I had belittled myself to feeling inexperienced and inadequate. We walked into the gallery and I saw the first piece, "Survival of the Prettiest," which was an oil painting featuring four life-size Barbies. I figured that if I understood none of the art at this show, at least I could relate to this- I mean I played with Barbies when I was five years old.

Bijal and I continued through the gallery, eventually splitting up as we encountered pieces we each individually liked. I began to relax as I saw that each piece was neither something extremely complicated nor esoteric. Instead they were just the artist's personal experience with how the world stereotyped her as a woman. I could definitely relate to each piece and by the end of the exhibition, realized that since each woman encounters societal notions of beauty and perfection in a different way, I couldn't be wrong in my interpretation as long as I drew on my own experiences as a woman.

My experience at "U-Genics" has then not made me an "experienced art reviewer," but has convinced me that as long as the viewer is committed to finding personal meaning in the art, they can't be wrong in their interpretation, and the artist's goal will be achieved.

What struck you about the gallery?

Yazmin

I loved how modern it was, I could definitely relate the show to my personal life... It definitely didn't hurt that the show was free and the bus dropped us off right in front of the gallery!

What was your first impression upon seeing Terri Thomas' work?

Bijal

Well the opening piece, "Survival of the Prettiest" opened the gallery very well. It was easy to see what direction she was going with the "barbie-esque" images...but further into the gallery her works became more abstract, giving me as the viewer a lot of room for interpretation. In the end I was very amazed not just at the works but how thematically everything fit together. The gallery provoked not just thought but also self-reflection, which I really enjoyed. Yazmin

The title of this show, "U-Genics" sums up the show nicely. It shows how our culture is so obsessed with the concept of outward perfection that we have started to employ science to genetically select for certain traits, creating a stereotype of beauty that is impossible to live up to and which ignores the individuality of each person.

What did you think of her different uses of media? I mean, there were oil on canvases, photographs, even videos and visuals...

Yazmin

By using all forms of media, Thomas made it possible for everyone to find a piece he/she could relate to. I personally loved the oil on canvases because they left a lot of room for interpretation- from every angle I looked at them, I feel like I gained a deeper understanding of the subject and her internal struggle with how the world perceives her. But, the videos, especially "Beauty and the Beast," were very personal. After watching, I felt like I actually knew the woman who put herself through the pain of getting an eyelift. Her happiness and pain became my own as I found I can relate to the impossible task of living up to a standard of beauty that demands "perfection."

After knowing Thomas' motives for creating this show, what main message to society did you take with you after viewing it? Bazmin

What I took away from the gallery is probably best reflected in the piece "The State of Becoming"...when I read the title my initial thought was, "Becoming what?" which I believe is the whole point. When we as females put on makeup, get our eyebrows done, treat our skins, put on glamorous dresses etc what are we becoming? The truth is no matter how much more "beautiful" you look, you are still no closer to loving yourself or even understanding yourself. For that there is no plastic surgery option.

What was your favorite piece?

Bazmin

One of the most unifying pieces for me was the framed C-print of a fetus called "The Promise: Baby's first portrait"...many people think art is just about the technical execution, but this piece which was a print spoke volumes for me. What were your thoughts on it?

Yazmin

It was a refreshing contrast to how we, as a society, have distorted the visual representation of people and how they should look. This first portrait of a baby shows how innocent and pure a photograph can be and how "beauty" is not necessarily what reveals whom a person is. This contrast is most vivid when one views "Parthenogenesis," which shows the several reflections of a nude woman fixing her hair, preparing to take her picture. She looks exhausted and worn down by the expectations she faces to have the perfect body and hair and freely showcase them to the public. How we have regressed from a society that values the internal contents of a person to one that treats beauty like a religion is clearly demonstrated by viewing these two pieces in succession.

Gallery Details

Exhibition

U-Genics by Terri Thomas

Dates

Open from September 30-November 12

Gallery hours

Tuesday-Saturday 11-9

Sunday-Monday 12-6 or by appointment

Cost

Free!

Location

Volitant Gallery at 320 Congress Avenue

Directions from the Quad

Take the 1 or 5 bus from the Guadalupe and 25th stop and get off at 4th and Congress. The gallery is on the Southwest corner.

Website

www.volitant.com

portfolio at Volitant

www.terriThomasart.com

on artifacts.net

on [flickr](http://flickr.com)