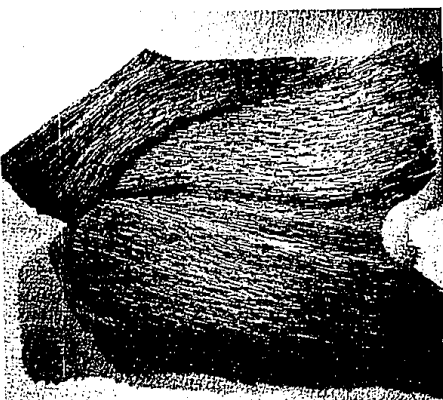




Corinne Abatt editor/644-1100

(F1E)

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"La Vida Fuerza" by B.J. Bennett, a 45 by 59-inch handmade paper wall sculpture, is brilliant in tones of purple, crimson garnet and emerald green.

Peru, China influence shows in work

By Benita Bornstein
special writer

Paper pulp and plenty of passion are the striking components of B.J. Bennett's large-scale handmade paper wall sculptures. "P.M. Voyage Series," an exhibition at the Robert L. Kidd Associates/Galleries in Birmingham.

"I take a wholistic attitude toward life, thus in my work I emphasize the interdependence of process, material, concept and image and, especially in this instance, its environment," said the University of Michigan-trained artist.

Bennett doesn't view herself as a purist, one who zeros in on a particular artistic concept. Rather, she sees herself as an artist who "takes everything of life back into my work."

In 1977, she lived and worked for two years in Peru where she experienced the dynamic nature of the Peruvian people as well as their colorful culture. The ancient bright Peruvian ponchos and Andean feather capes captivated her fancy and artistic eye.

In the summer of 1984, Bennett visited the Peoples Republic of China with the U.S. Delegation of Textile Artists. While there, she absorbed the possibilities of the colorful silk industry, the forthright folk paintings of Chinese children and the jagged mountain peaks bordering the Li River near Guilin.

She also became involved in tai chi chuan, a form of martial arts that stresses the coordination of mind, emotion, and physical being to achieve one harmonious self.

THIS INTERDEPENDENCE of all things forming a whole is crucial to Bennett's personal and artistic philosophy.

When she returned, she found that her desire to create a series based on her experiences in China made her work too hard to translate all she saw and felt into artistic terms.

When she delved into her unconscious, Peru, the brightly colored ponchos and feather capes emerged and with it the China experience, which developed into what Bennett calls the "Peru-China Connection."

The "P.M." of the exhibition's title refers to Pat Metheny who represents Bennett's growing interest in the dance.

Thus, for Bennett, all three experiences form a rhythmic harmony that she has innovatively translated into a new visual form.

THE PROCESS itself attests to the evolution of experience as new life and meaning are given to the raw materials of plant fiber and paper pulp.

Originally a painter, Bennett found herself without supplies while in Peru. Frustrated, she cut-up postcards and began forming assemblages. She then began to cut paintings, finding herself increasingly more interested in constructed paintings and actual paper composition.

While in Ann Arbor, she studied pa-

per making. Because she required a sturdy support as a base for her paper, she turned to a sculptor who taught her how to work with clay and molds.

ULTIMATELY, SHE broke out of the beginning rectangular boundaries and into the high reliefs that project from the wall.

Bennett begins with a clay mold, followed by a reverse plaster mold. Wet paper pulp is poured into the mold forming an armature of two-three inches.

On top of this base, she forms a slotting structure. More than 1,000 pieces of handmade, vibrantly hand-colored layers of dye, acrylic, gouache and inks are inserted into the slotting structure and protrude in a pattern and proportion that moves and changes as according to the light and perspective.

Because all components must work together, if one layer is out of "sync," the entire whole is disrupted.

Bennett's interest in color is revealed by the intensity and excitement the pieces generate. "Dream Voyage" is, in fact, a dreamy golden sculpture of tightly packed layered and interlocked torn shades of golden yellow that look from a distance like fiber.

Radiant gold metallic and mohair threads are woven through the flowing and glowing piece. "La Vida Fuerza" moves in deep jewel tones of purples, crimson garnet and dark emerald greens. "Through the Clouds" is a display of blues ranging to aqua, a horizon with shards of lilac.

ESSENTIALLY, Bennett's handmade paper wall sculptures reveal process — an evolution and totality of experience.

Recently, Bennett was awarded the University of Michigan Alumni Art '84 Juror Award, the Michigan Watercolor Society Exhibition Award and Foundation for the Arts/First.

Also on exhibition are the monotypes of New York artist Valentina Dubasky and the prints of New Orleans artist Ida Kohlmeier. Using the print process, Dubasky's single-print pieces on Japanese paper are like paintings or collages on paper.

Using her familiar subject of animals — cows, sheep, bears, pigs — Dubasky consciously alludes to the cave paintings of Lascaux and Altamira. She takes the primal image and reduces it even further to the rectangle, a table perhaps, its legs holding up a vessel as a kind of trophy.

THE IMAGES are figurative but at once abstracted and primitive. The tiny heads on bulky lumbering bodies or animals yawning whimsically lend a touch of humor to Dubasky's work.

Kohlmeier's playful symbols, their warmth and color give her silkscreens a sense of celebration and joy. Art News has declared this "Ida Kohlmeier Month," capping her 30 year career.

The three-artist exhibition extends through Saturday. Hours are 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday. The gallery is at 107 Townsend St., Birmingham.

By Carol Azizian
staff writer

Setting: Museum of Modern Art in New York City.

Characters: Pedro E. Guerrero, architectural photographer extraordinaire. Anonymous Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) official, typical bureaucratic bungler.

Fictionalized re-creation of conversation:

MOMA official: Guerrero, we're commissioning you to take aesthetically pleasing photographs of a historically important Frank Lloyd Wright building — the chapel at Florida Southern College in Lakeland. We promise to reward you handsomely.

Guerrero (something clicks inside his brain): What a break! A major museum is giving me exposure. I'll probably earn at least \$100 for this assignment.

MOMA official (smug, sarcastic): Good work, Guerrero. A week's work, an hour's wages. Here's your \$1.50. Not bad for a beginner.

Guerrero (shy, shocked, thinking to himself): That job wasn't worth getting my suit out of the cleaners for. It's not even enough for the cab fare home.

he price tag on the photograph of Frank Lloyd Wright's chapel has skyrocketed since that fateful day in 1948 — and so has Guerrero's career.

ARCHITECTURAL Forum eventually paid Guerrero a handsome price to publish his picture in the magazine. Galleries in New York and Chicago sell 11-by-14-inch prints of the original for \$300 to \$500.

And one of the Mexican photographer's most prized possessions — the last portrait taken of Wright before he died — is going for \$750.

Last week, Steelcase Inc., a leading designer and manufacturer of office furniture, displayed a selection of Guerrero's photographs of architect Frank Lloyd Wright, artist Alexander Calder and sculptor Louise Nevelson in its Southfield showroom.

The 67-year-old "recorder of history" from New Canaan, Conn., shared stories about three giants of the art world. "All three felt a great need to have an individual identity," he said.

That same need, however, wasn't the driving force behind Guerrero's artistic achievement. "I was just in the right place at the right time."

It was more than sheer luck that got Guerrero into the prestigious, all-boys apprentice school called Taliesin West in Paradise Valley, Ariz. It was the combination of guts, grit and talent.

After studying at Los Angeles Art School, Guerrero returned to his native Arizona to work with his father. "I was a flunkie in a sign shop. You can dignify it by saying I did sign painting." Bored with his no-hum, 8-to-5 job, Guerrero decided to take a chance and visit Wright.

He showed him photography samples — "a mixed bag" including a sentimental picture of a little girl and a dog, two or three nudes and a still life of a platter with ham and eggs.

Coincidentally, he arrived the day after Wright's photographer had quit and he got the job.

"I was terribly young and inexperienced when he gave me the one chance I needed," the photographer recalled.

"I was a small-town kid. He exposed me to great music, art, literature and even taught me how to pour wine."

Recording life at the Taliesin fellowship included snapping shots of apprentices in their day-to-day chores — farming, canning and preserving — as well as taking photos of building designs for major museum exhibits.

ALTHOUGH his career was interrupted only a year after it started — he was drafted into the Air Corps — Guerrero's working relationship with Wright continued for 19 years.



In Guerrero's photograph of Frank Lloyd Wright, the architect is wearing his characteristic pork pie hat, stiff collar, flowing tie and tweed cape. It was taken in 1963 at his retrospective exhibition at a pavilion on the present site of the Guggenheim Museum. The model is "Wingspread," home for Herbert Johnson of the Johnson Wax Co.

In focus Remembering Wright, Calder



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

Pedro Guerrero speaks about his photograph of an important Frank Lloyd Wright building, the chapel at Florida Southern College. The Museum of Modern Art paid

him \$1.50 for the photograph in 1948. Above is the last portrait taken of Frank Lloyd Wright. It is in his studio before he died in 1959.

"He always treated me as an equal," Guerrero said. "We were never competitors as every apprentice potentially was. Our relationship survived over the years because there was no ego rivalry."

"But I still called him Mr. Wright — usually at attention," he joked. Guerrero's friendship with Calder was much less formal. "We were good friends," he said. "He was absolutely one of the warmest, jolliest men I've ever known."

"He liked to be called Sandy (his nickname). Mr. was too stiff and Alexander was too long."

They met while Guerrero was on a routine assignment for House and Garden. He supplied his income by working for other magazines as well — House Beautiful, Better Homes and Gardens, Harper's Bazaar.

"Somebody had seen Calder's kitchen and suggested we photograph it. As soon as I walked in, I realized it wasn't House and Garden material. Everything was handmade, second-hand or 'make-dos'."

ALTHOUGH he couldn't sell the photographs to the magazine, Guerrero spent several years with Calder, taking pictures of everything but the kitchen sink.

"Everything he made enchanted me — the toilet paper dispensers, dolls, toys, mobiles, paintings. His studio was very cluttered but he was orderly. Once he told me, 'be careful where you stand because all the things in here are important to me.'"

By the 1960s, Guerrero had compiled enough

photos for a book. The idea was before its time. Publishers turned him down, saying Calder's work wasn't important enough. They must have eaten their words because Guerrero's photos now grace the pages of several Calder books.

Shortly after Calder died in 1976, Guerrero met the third artistic giant — Louise Nevelson — through a mutual friend, art patron Jean Lipman. The pictures he took were eventually incorporated in Lipman's book about the famous sculptor.

"She (Nevelson) is a marvelous character. She had a terrible time overcoming resistance because she was a woman. At one time, the (art world) was reluctant to give women credit for anything."

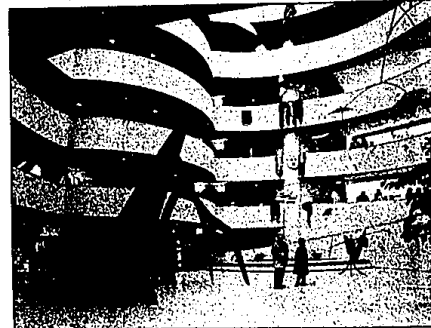
Guerrero photographed Nevelson in her "bizarre outfits" — dresses with layers of fabrics and a scarf always covering her head. When she's in formal wear, she puts on a black velvet riding hat.

In one shot, her eccentric look and garish clothes contrast with the stark white walls of a sanctuary in St. Peter's Church in New York City, which she designed.

Guerrero also entered the "inner sanctum" of Nevelson's expansive home in Little Italy in New York City to shoot pictures of her at work.

"Every room is a repository for her art work," he said. "She has collected hundreds of things — tin cans, odd pieces of lumber, a cow weather vane. Someday, she will put them all together to make pieces of art that will sell for millions of dollars."

Someday, Guerrero might gather all of his photographs for a book on the three artists.



Guerrero's photograph shows a meeting of the work of two giants of the arts — Alexander Calder's sculpture displayed in the Guggenheim Museum designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.