

Ruben Nieto

By Todd Camplin

To paraphrase from a phone conversation with my friend in Kentucky, the essence of a typical Blockbuster comic book movie is the attempt to move a plot from one special effect explosion to another action packed scene. At Cris Worley Fine Arts, the blank walls are the only quiet moments you can get, because Ruben Nieto's designed paintings are as busy and bold as any Hollywood popcorn film.

Ruben Nieto's images lay waste to direct reference to comic books. In most of the works; the panels, characters, and iconography have been placed on a pyre and blown to smithereens. His paintings resemble a Splash page of a comic, because Nieto wants to grab your attention with action lines and objects that seem to want to fly off the canvas. The crazy artificial colors he uses blind you with contrast and complementary colors. His use of black only emphasizes the chaos of shapes emanating from a highly charged singularity. The cluster of shapes do reveal hints of his source material, but less so than his previous series. Nieto manages to push his paintings into further abstraction, like Mondrian, he took recognizable images and pushed them into a non-objective realm.

Back in my comic book collection days in the 1990's, the comic companies were doing every gimmick they could think of to sell their books. They would come out with one shots or one issue books, limited run, mini-series books, holograms, and multiple covers for the same book. When I am surrounded by Nieto's paintings, I feel immersed in that world again. The triptych, Warhol in Wonderland could easily be a Keith Giffen book with a trifold stapled in the center. But the comics aren't the only art reference I see. His randomness, cartoony approach in the work Sultan, Pollock, and Warhol Had Chinese for Lunch seems to allude to an artist style of someone like Howard Sherman; although Nieto is more landscape abstraction, whereas Sherman is more character driven.

I think Nieto has tapped into our cultural obsession with violent theater. With CGI film effects, we walk into movies expecting blood, guts, and explosions. Movies and TV dramas push a little plot around to get to the next conflict. But unlike those other mediums, a painting can freeze that moment and now we can have time to reflect on the fast action. We are pausing at the moment of the highest drama, the split second when the bomb goes off. Rather than react instinctually to actions, we can sit and contemplate about the moment, thus Nieto has changed our relationship of the drama inducing, manufactured explosion.

I can't ignore the front room gallery, because Adela Andea always demands my attention. Always charming and filled with energy, Andea's piece Nebula feels like the future of art. I was just introduced to the work by Robert Lansden and I am already crazy about it. Isabelle du Toit and Rusty Scruby grace the walls with some good work as well. Fiber tip pen on paper, talk about right up my alley. Both the Front Gallery group show and Ruben Nieto's "Shadow Paintings" come down June 22nd.