

Orlando Leyba

comes into play as the painting progresses.

"I love using car/low-rider imagery in my work along with creating visual languages based on words, slang, and many times it will be about textures or color juxtapositions." Leyba says. "But I often think that a lot of my work is about the passing of time, death, exposing contradiction and the beauty of what is beneath the obvious."

Leyba says that he often paints late at night — from about nine or ten until three or so in the morning.

"My wife complains a bit because after four or five hours of painting I am unable to speak clearly. That part of my brain just shuts down." Leyba continues. "That is the best time to paint — very few distractions."

Leyba says that another reason he paints is because at some level the act of painting is very familiar to him, as if somewhere there is an ancestor who was also an artist and Leyba received his or her capacity for painting.

His current work, which will be shown at the Blue Rain Gallery in Santa Fe, is not that much different than what he has been producing in the past. His work skirts/borders on what is abstract and what is recognizable. Subjects often are pictured as dichotomies — beauty versus decay, etc.

"I like to break things down and present them in their purest form, if possible." Leyba explains. "I also like to leave clues or moments where someone could look at my imagery and connect it to something that is perhaps familiar to them. Above all I hope that I leave plenty of room

for personal interpretation when you look at my work."

Leyba says that working in a more realistic fashion, like Photo-realism, isn't appealing to him because it is 'too contrived, too mapped out'.

"I want the spirit and emotion of the piece to hit you." Leyba says.

Leyba then describes three of his current pieces.

'Tsimayab-Chaouen':

"Tsimayoh was one of the original Tewa or Tano spellings for Chimayo, which coincidentally, had two meanings. One was where the rock flaked easily, which I assumed was a reference to the abundance of obsidian in that area. The other definition was loosely interpreted as the place where where one path or river divides or forks into two.

"Chaouen is a village that was a sanctuary for the Jews and Muslims fleeing the Spanish inquisition.

"I juxtaposed these two places because of the religious background of both places. It's interesting to me that this one place in Morocco harbored the ancestors of the Jews & Muslims that are at such odds with each other to this very day. My only reference to this type of persecution was the simple tension that was present between the majority Catholic population of Chimayo and Northern NM and the smaller Protestant population of that same region. I essentially grew up vascillating between those two worlds and would often question the role of religion in general because of those conflicting perspectives that confronted me throughout my adolescent life. I was very curious about the penitentes

that would parade every Good Friday in front of my house and at the same time was taught that their religious views were more pagan than proper. Protestant teachings seemed much more digestible and understandable than the mysterious Catholics and their saints displayed every so often as in my grandmother's house. Anywho, that was the impetus for this painting, the friction and overlapping of all religions and the interpretations that spew forth. Sometimes beauty emerges from this and other times, as we are experiencing now, we have the opposite, war. I suppose as a kid I always wondered what was happening at any given moment, to any place on earth in contrast to my immediate surroundings of Chimayo. I always wanted to see myself in the context of the world and not to the next town over. I still do."

'Snop Dogg':

"I think the 'Snop Dogg' painting was really about the anxiety and ultimate relief for my sons Santiago, 16 at the time and Solomon 13 to see something American. They were worried that Morocco was going to be dangerous and unpredictable after being in a city like Madrid. So, when we came upon this graffiti in a Moroccan back alley, we all laughed firstly at the way it was misspelled and secondly, I think, because it was so unexpected. I think they felt we were in a truly alien environment and got some relief from this moment. Ultimately, the contrast between the US, Spain, & Morocco for them gave them a perspective that most young teenagers don't have here. They commented on how the contrast between a country like Morocco, which seemed to have no laws, and a civilized, predictable country like Spain were not so different in the way

people interact and live day to day. The connections between people, regardless of their nationality and religious views can be a wondrous beautiful thing. Not to sound too sappy or anything, but I really thought my boys grew from this experience and hopefully now see the world a little bit differently, as I do."

'Gun Camera':

"As far as Gun Camera, I simply wanted to use vague imagery of an airplane flying in some sort of gun sight with the colors of my memories of North Africa. So on one level, I'm somewhat reverting back to my childhood impulses of drawing things that stimulated my imagination and on the other hand, I'm trying to express my fears and anxieties and excitement of flying into a part of the world that to me personally, was unknown. I had very little idea of what the sights, sounds, smells of Morocco would be. Not to mention that I had recently read a NY Times report, about the number of suicide bombers that came from a particular city in Morocco, Rabat, I think. So with all that the Bush administration was doing in the middle east and some of the warnings I had been given about going into an Islamic dominated area like N. Africa, I imagined all sorts of bad things. As it turned out, my imagination got the better of me, but also created a catalyst to make art from. It was the best experience of my life, every high school graduate should be required to go to a third world country for a month and experience as much as possible. I really miss the call to prayer that would wake me at 4:30 every morning!"

Leyba says he doesn't strive to describe 'my style' because he doesn't need it. But if pushed to

place a label on him, perhaps 'an urban abstract minimalist who paints about obscure and sometimes rural places and people' might fit.

Not a well-known genre but it does have an interesting ring to it.

Leyba usually starts with water based paints like casein, acrylic, then moves on to shellac paint, enamel sign paint, found paper and sometimes objects, and eventually uses, as a final layer, oil glazes. He does a lot of layering and scraping and sanding. He also achieves layers with transparent paint imagery over other opaque imagery — or vice versa.

But he adds, "I will use anything that I think will add to my piece."

A question that comes up often when visiting with artists is, 'Why do you create?'

Leyba responds;

"I paint because it makes me feel alive, as corny as that sounds. It is incredible the state you're in when completely immersed in your work."

Essentials

What: Orlando Gabby Leyba — New Works

When: Opens Friday, November 7, continues through Friday, November 21. Opening reception, Friday, November 7, at 5 P.M.

Where: Blue Rain Gallery, 130 Lincoln Avenue, Santa Fe

Info: 505.954.9902



Searching for the Saadian Tombs

When you look at the paintings of Orlando Leyba, you are confronted with very personal and complex images. There seem to be a variety of styles working in Leyba's pieces and so at times you find yourself making comparisons to Richard Diebenkorn's color palette and his use of negative space; Ellsworth Kelly's unassuming technique that emphasizes the simplicity of form; Robert Rauschenberg's assemblages; Agnes Martin during the Taos Modern's postwar abstract period; or even at rare times, Hundertwasser.

Leyba grew up in Chimayó. He says his parents emphasized a strong education, perhaps to avoid the prejudices that they had endured during their lives.

He learned Spanish from his agrarian lifestyle grandparents where raising and butchering livestock and other animals was the norm as well as growing and tending large, bountiful gardens.

Working with his grandfather he learned 'how to work' — irrigating, hoeing, baling hay, etc.

He attended McCurdy and then University of New Mexico in

Albuquerque where he earned a Bachelors in Art Studio, and then ventured east for a while to attend the Maryland Institute, College of Art, in Baltimore, Md., where he received his MA in Art Education and an MFA in painting.

"I have always drawn." Leyba says. "And watched my father paint in watercolors as well as do after school art projects when he taught in Truchas. I have always been attracted to color and visual input that implores me to be motivated with my own artistic impulses."

Leyba teaches art at the

Albuquerque Academy in Albuquerque and says teaching has influenced the way he approaches his own work.

"The act of teaching does assist in my own work." Leyba explains. "Primarily in that I am amazed at what my students will attempt given challenges and certain parameters. I know I've learned to be more daring from just watching my students go after my assignment. I probably could spend all my time painting, but I have to admit that I think doing what I'm doing has been the best of both worlds. I think the message I impart to my students is one of

balance. To make time for both work and play, but most of all follow your heart. If you want to make art, do it. I have been teaching art for twenty years. I think the hardest thing about teaching is trying to get your students to just get a glimmer of their artistic potential, to get their eye (observational skills) coordinated with their hands."

Leyba decides on his subjects usually by something that inspires him. That sounds simple but in reality, once you view his works, you realize that being inspired is just a jumping off point for his work, and a multitude of other factors