Jun-1995

Mercedes Nuñez - New Work

Mercedes Nuñez
Bridgewater State College, mnunez@bridgew.edu

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://vc.bridgew.edu/br_rev/vol14/iss1/8

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.
As a fine artist, the conceptual focus of my work relates to my cultural and spiritual background and its connection to those indigenous cultures found in North America. My work is a visual language through which I explore the images and rituals of my Afro-Cuban heritage, and of the first Americans, particularly those tribal communities found in the southwestern part of the United States. Having immigrated to the United States from the island of Cuba, I have come to view my artwork as an extension of the African and Caribbean influences which make-up my cultural history. My palette is indicative of the heat and passion of my heritage, and the desire to communicate a language filled with mysticism and Latin rhythm. The work explores a communal existence with the natural environment, where the collective we is equal to the lands, the mountains and the oceans that we inhabit. It is a visual narrative that fuses the rich cultural diversity of my heritage and my ecofeminist philosophy and politics.

“Gila River Goddess,” 4x6”. 1994 assemblage: wood box, rock, soil — box is painted with tempera and coloured pencils. (Collection of William House).
Three out of the five pieces reproduced in this Spring 1995 issue of the Bridgewater Review form part of a series entitled, "Canciones del Monte, Canciones de la Tierra Madre," (songs of the mountainside, songs of the earth mother). The other two pieces came about while listening to music that was both sensual and seductive. The works on paper are produced initially with a sumi ink or black tempera drawing that act as an extension of my subconscious, allowing the paint to take on a stream-of-consciousness quality that relates not only to the forms developing within the image area, but to the need for release and desire. The work on canvas, unlike the freer work on paper, is a carefully weaved parable that develops meticulously through specific iconography, color and form, while allowing for the spontaneity that must be present in all creative processes.

In "Flight of the Great Spirit," the initial focus was to begin the drawing process without any preconceived ideas about the subject matter. My concern was to experiment with a process that would afford me the freedom to explore with different media combinations, while reducing the desire for absolute control. As a result of this "randomness with purpose," the image of Thunderbird, The Great Spirit Creator developed through the application of paint. It is the process of working through the uncertainty of forms, and finding that the only prerequisite for this artistic process is to trust your senses.
The piece entitled “Gila River Goddess,” is a result of my visit in March of 1994 to the Gila Cliff Dwellings located within the Gila National Forest and Wilderness area in New Mexico. This assemblage is a celebration of the Mogollon tribe who made these dwellings their home in the early part of the twelfth century. The rock is from the Gila River at the bottom of the cliffs which house the dwellings, and the soil I collected as I weaved in and out of the different structures. In New Mexico, I experienced a spiritual connection, a oneness with the land and its people, the kind I have never felt before in my adult life. It was a magnetic pull that seduced and inspired my imagination.
The painting “Elegua y Okalu,” is the fusion of two cultures and spiritual beliefs. Elegua is a spirit guide in the Yoruba Lucumi tribe and is worshiped in the Santeria religion as it is practiced in Cuba and Puerto Rico, while Okalu is the Spirit of the Dawn in the Pueblo nation. In this painting you find the image of Elegua on the right; he is surrounded by the visual iconography representing the other spiritual guides, Ogun, Ochosi and Osun who work alongside Elegua. This piece is symbolic of the spiritual connections I see between my Santeria religion and spirituality in Native American culture.

The “Esperanza,” and “Fumbling Towards Ecstasy,” pieces depart from a cultural and spiritual focus to one that embraces the raw emotions of passion, love and desire. Both of these pieces evolved out of a Zen-like state while listening to the music of Sarah McLachlan. This creative process allows the images created to have a different feel with regard to mark-making and color application, evoking a sense of immediacy that has never been a part of my work before. Perhaps the best way to describe the process is to say that it is born out of a hunger for self-expression and the intrinsic relationship that develops out of this artistic language.