

Unseen presence (Herald Palladium article)

Krasl Art Center's two-person exhibit 'feeds off each other'

By JEREMY D. BONFIGLIO – H-P Features Writer



Photo provided Sergio Gomez's "Summer" is among the paintings featured in the traveling exhibition "Presence Absence," which opens with a reception Friday at the Krasl Art Center in St. Joseph.

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ST. JOSEPH – Mark Zlotkowski says he was “just blown away” the first time he saw the work of fellow painter Sergio Gomez at the Mexican Fine Arts Museum in Chicago. So a few months later when their work was paired in a group show at 33 Collective Gallery, the two artists discovered that they were both members of the mutual admiration society.

“We both kind of saw this inner dialogue between our work,” Zlotkowski says. “Although subject matters are not that similar, textures, colors some of the symbolism just feeds off each other, and we both responded to that.” The result is “Presence Absence,” a traveling two-person exhibition of paintings that opens Friday and continues through June 5 at the Krasl Art Center. The nearly 40 works on display, some of which were shown together in their first pairing in 2009, explore the lifecycles, human condition and notions of spirituality found in both Zlotkowski’s and Gomez’s work.

“In my work, there are a lot of sources of light where light comes in spiritually,” Gomez says by telephone from his home in Dyer, Ind. “In his work there are areas where light seems to emerge from a dark background. It’s the same idea in how we approach the technique – a lot of layering of color, producing a good amount of texture.”

The similarities, however, end there.

Gomez was born in Puebla, Mexico. Zlotkowski grew up on Chicago’s South Side.

Gomez felt a bit lost when at age 16 he and his family moved from Mexico City to Joliet, Ill., where his father, a minister, was called to a Spanish-speaking parish.

Zlotkowski, meanwhile, was getting lost in his own work.

“I remember sitting down working on a drawing when my

parents were getting ready to go to dinner,” Zlotkowski says. “They walked out and walked right back in and I said, ‘Aren’t you going to dinner?’ and they said ‘We just got back from dinner.’ I was lost in time, lost in the process. That’s when I knew this was something important for me.”

Gomez attended Joliet Junior College, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Governors State University and Northern Illinois University, where he received a Master of Fine Arts degree.

Zlotkowski earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in painting from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, and his Master of Fine Arts degree

from Northwestern. He began teaching at DePaul three months later and has been teaching in the Department of Art and Media Design ever since.

Gomez, meanwhile, joined the faculty at South Suburban College in Holland, Ill., became an independent curator for the Zhou B. Art Center in Chicago and co-founded 33 Collective Gallery, where he met Zlotkowski.

When it comes to the work itself, both artists start with rich palettes of color. Gomez works in acrylic and often features ambiguous masculine figures. Zlotkowski paints in oils, on both canvas and panel, and his pieces are more abstract.

“I just let the process dictate the work,” Zlotkowski says. “I start with color and movement and develop form from that. At the end it’s like a chess match, for each move is very deliberate, but the process up until that point is completely intuitive.”

Among the paintings on display in the current incarnation of “Presence Absence” is a new piece by Zlotkowski titled “Towards the Within.” The painting features two vessels in the lower section: one turned upright; the other facing downward. Both contain what appears to be light. On the left and right sides of the canvas are a male form and a female form, which Zlotkowski says deals with “duality. The yin and yang of life. The necessity of duality to create wholeness.”

Gomez also has a new piece for the Krasl exhibit titled “Coram Deo,” Latin for “In the presence of God.” The large canvas (6½ feet by 7½ feet) features a dark figure with a ray of light coming down from above.

Gomez also will be spotlighting his four companion pieces “Summer,” “Fall,” “Spring” and “Winter,” which have often anchored previous “Presence Absence” exhibitions.

Although both artists have had their share of solo exhibitions, they also hope to continue their collaboration and adding to “Presence Absence” in the future. In fact, the show is already booked for the Indianapolis Art Center when it leaves the Krasl in June.

“Our work just seems to work so well together,” Zlotkowski says. “Even if I can’t explain it, it just fits.”

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WHAT: “Presence Absence,” featuring the work of Sergio Gomez and Mark Zlotkowski

WHEN: Opening reception 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Friday; exhibit continues during regular hours through June 5

WHERE: Krasl Art Center, 707 Lake Blvd., St. Joseph

HOW MUCH: Free

CONTACT: 983-0271 or www.krasl.org