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Artist's work is influenced by Miami, Cuban heritage

By Ricardo Mor
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Ricardo Mor / For the Miami Herald

Artist Joseriberto Perez's postal worker parents inspired this work, which is a bundle of envelopes stained in coffee.

Joseriberto Perez, an emerging artist based in Miami, seems to avoid assigning his works meaning; he prefers the works to be ambiguous to the viewer and to lead to their own conclusions. But if you look closely, the artist has managed to create a body of work that examines his Cuban heritage and Miami upbringing in interesting ways.

Born in New Jersey to Cuban parents, Perez grew up in Coconut Grove where he says he spent most of his time “with young people [his] age slumming around outside.” In high school, he decided to become an artist because of his interest in street art (which led to his appreciation of contemporary art) and his desire to work for himself.

Although he attended art school in Chicago, his works draw a lot from his experience with the unique climate and landscape of his hometown. This is most evident in his paintings, arguably the artist's prolific practice.

“I think if you look at the work, there's a sense of the space, color and light here in Miami.”

He uses his brush to create scenes that draw from the city's lush landscapes and vibrant color palette. His works are often abstract with paint streaking across the canvas with rugged

precision. Sometimes geometric patterns will ground the roughness with symmetry, other times shadows of figurative forms such as fauna will make an appearance.

While his paintings are all his own, they often borrow from the language of artists before him such as Mark Rothko and Robert Motherwell. By appropriating the styles from the past, he is able to add his own narrative and vision to the conversation.

While painting appears to be his primary practice, he works with a number of other media including sculpture and screen printing. These practices are often incorporated together to

create eclectic multimedia works that draw from his heritage.

In one work, a large slab of Cuban mahogany wood appears to be holding up a orange and yellow toned gradient painting. In another work, a linen curtain painted in what appears to be palm leaves hides another small, unassuming work made from found objects.

While his work is heavily influenced by Miami, it is undoubtedly just as influenced by his Cuban heritage. Growing up with his Cuban grandparents, he was fascinated by their resourcefulness and ability to make do with what they had, a product of their modest livelihood in their home country. This ability to be resourceful has become an essential component in his work.

“I lived around a lot of improvised situations around the house in their daily life that was creative to me ... I extrapolated that as how someone can approach things differently.”

These influences prop up in his works in ways. Hanging from the roof on a thin red rope is a bundle of empty envelopes, a reference to his postal worker parents, dyed with coffee. Several works also utilize found objects, such as decorative mangoes, that reference his heritage in subtle ways. More directly, his grandfather makes an appearance in one work, his face print on a silkscreen that is folded onto a table adorned with other objects.

Perez has had a banner year having had a solo exhibition of his paintings at Guccivuitton gallery in Little Haiti and currently in the middle of an artist residency at Cannonball, a non-profit arts organization based in downtown where his works are on display.

Because of his Cannonball residency, Perez has been able to explore mediums that he wanted to work further in; the sculptures he created at Cannonball are the first he has ever presented to the public. This freedom has been critical for the artist as he says his work is driven by the mistakes he makes in the creation of his art.

While Perez is still very much exploring where his craft will take him, he remains adamant in pushing his method by being resourceful in his practice.”

“You don't always have the perfect tool or the right thing for your work but you have to make the right thing if you don't have it.”

If you go

What: Joseriberto Perez exhibition and studio visits

When: Now through December by appointment

Where: Cannonball, 1035 N. Miami Ave., Suite 300, downtown Miami

For more information: Contact the artist at joseribertoperez@yahoo.com.