

JOHN ANDRO AVENDANO

Chaos in Order *An Exhibition for Ant-Violence*

THE WHY

My position has always been one of anti-violence, as far back as my childhood. I grew up Hispanic, born in Arleta, California, and rooted in East Los Angeles. Daily, I was either in the shadows or lived adjacent to violence. Anti-violence movements were a big part of the California scene in our Hispanic community.

My siblings, two brothers, were ten years my senior, both military – Vietnam era. My mother, our rock, “Anastasia Orozco Avendano ” was very proactive in our local church; protective, productive, and positive. She reminded me of the importance and need for “family.” She inspired me and often spoke of our distant relative, One of the “Big Three” Mexican Muralists, Jose Clemente Orozco (1883-1949). Historically, he faced political turmoil, violence, and anti-violence movements. But rose above all the chaos and became a steward of his gifts.

As an artist, I want my artworks to be known, significant and documented by history. But with this history in the making today, I struggle, as I just wanted to put it behind me. What arose up from 2020 to the current turmoils locally in Seattle, nationally, and abroad has been difficult. A constant reminder ... “You can’t connect the dots forward, but you can connect them backward.” Another challenge was that I like to paint beautiful things, beautiful paintings, as an expression of healing; if not a cure, can they be a good remedy, a healing balm?

THE PROCESS

Together, in 2020 we were isolated, immobilized, powerless, and fearful as violence escalated locally and abroad. There was much talk of protecting oneself, one's speech, and one's community. In my studio, I looked at a blank canvas, opened my flat files, and took an old stack of collage paper – among them, targets. I researched the usage of this symbol and similar usage that produced the “Bullseye series” by artist Jasper Johns from 1955-1961. Reluctantly, I thought, how do I take something offensive, viscerally disturbing, and raw that symbolizes the fear I was experiencing into something beautiful and healing?

Disassembling the image in front of me began the creative process. I took the figure in my hand, started at the top, and tore strip after strip from top to bottom. Then, something beautiful happened... I rearranged the pieces into new free-flowing forms, lines, and shapes on the canvas. Next, I applied bright, bold colors with oil paints and scraped the finish with broad strokes, further moving the images. Finally, I stopped and stepped back, remaining still so I could study and search for more inspiration as the oil paints dry. This pause catalyzed my imagination to take off again as I reapproached the painting with oil sticks, pastel pencils, and markers. More hidden images would appear and emerge from the layers. I knew the piece was complete when the canvas vibrated in a beautiful rhythmic motion all on its own, as the painting would stop talking to me.

My deep love of our humanity – its paradoxical virtues of love and compassion in contrast with the imperfection(s) of this world – have inspired this anti-violence exhibition: “Chaos in Order”.

CURATOR'S COMMENTS

Seattle-based, Latino painter John Andro Avendano (b.1959) in his first solo exhibition in Seattle, presents a powerful body of recent work dedicated to anti-violence. Comprised of fifteen vibrantly colorful paintings in oil/mixed media on canvas and panel, they visually form a refutation of the violence we've repeatedly witnessed as a nation and a world.

“I grew up Hispanic, born in Arleta, California, and rooted in East Los Angeles. Daily, I was either in the shadows or lived adjacent to, violence” Growing up in East LA, Avendano’s mother, Anastasia Orozco Avendano, reminded him of the importance and need for family. She often spoke of her great uncle – one of the “Big Three” Mexican Muralists, Jose Clemente Orozco (1883-1949). “Historically, he faced political turmoil, violence, and anti-violence movements. But rose above all the chaos and became a steward of his gifts.”

Avendano, who just turned 63 in June, has been an artist all his adult life and he brings that creative experience and maturity to this dynamic show of paintings. As the theme behind these paintings began to evolve in the artist’s mind, John – a former gun-owner and target shooter, ironically turned to the paper targets in his files. Personally, I initially found this to be not as much a refutation of violence but a visceral reminder of it. But as I frequently say “Find great artists and get out of the way.” Using a razor blade, Avendano began deconstructing the targets into various random shapes, literally destroying their original purpose for the former target shooter and reimagining them as the artist. These then became the foundation of each painting. Sometimes they’re obscured entirely by his colorful palette and at others, they peek through the paint to remind us of the human cost of violence in every form. Avendano transformed these bits of paper – visceral symbols of violence into profoundly emotional and beautiful paintings of “anti-violence”; each a stunningly visual metaphor of the paradox which is man.

This gallery’s programming has always revolved around the history of art, specifically the 20th century, and every contemporary artist living today is essentially standing on the shoulders of those who came before them. Avendano was deeply influenced by the Mexican muralists – particularly his great, great uncle, Orozco – and both European and American Modern. Much of the work ranges from figurative expressionism (Homage To Ukraine, Silent Witness, Red Mass) to Surrealism (The Guardians, Prophet) to pure abstraction (Then The Fog Lifted, Symphony For Kyiv).

I’m fond of a quote attributed to the late British arts writer/critic, Kenneth Clarke. When praising an artist of particular accomplishment and skill, he’d describe them as “many men thick”;

meaning an artist who'd absorbed the work of those who came before them and consolidated those influences into a singularly personal vernacular. One might find the subtle DNA threads of Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Max Ernst, pre-action painting Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Orozco, David Siqueros, or others in a favorite painting but these are unmistakably John Andro Avendano – an artist “many men thick”.