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Frank X. Tolbert at State Thomas

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3. *Chuco and Carmen* is part of **Rosemary Meza's** *Sorry Feet and Apologetic Butts*.

Frank X. Tolbert at State Thomas Frank X. Tolbert's exuberance is uncontainable - it explodes in all directions. Although everything in his State Thomas show is part of "The Gulf Coast Project" he has been working on for seven years, he's all over the map in terms of image and execution. Following in the tradition of his father, the late Texas folklorist Frank Tolbert, he's a storyteller of the first order.

And the stories ramble - endlessly.

His vernacular has changed slightly since his move from Dallas to Galveston in early 1991, but it still revolves around nature.

The most prevalent images now are fish and sea fowl, palm trees and water. But the human presence is felt everywhere, and his own image crops up often - as a modern Neptune in the *Nightfishing* painting used on the gallery invitation or as a mythic creature in large charcoal drawings from the "Driftwood Head" series.

Lately he seems adept at all he tries. The show includes exquisite little watercolor drawings of birds and frenzied oil-on-paper paintings, including one that makes Roseate Spoonbills look like blobs of bubble-gum pink energy bursting in the air. He does simple line drawings of the utmost elegance, uses dark silhouettes to convey the ominous character of a soaring chemical plant and depicts an unfortunate turtle that wandered into the path of a lawn mower as a splattered mess.

It's a rare combination of raucous humor and romantic reverie, reality and myth. His point of view is all-encompassing, but his message - the interconnectedness of man and nature and of the body and the spirit - is simple.

- Janet Kutner * "Frank X. Tolbert: The Gulf Coast Project" is on view through Dec. 15 at State Thomas Gallery, 2613 Thomas Ave. Hours are Wednesday through Saturday from noon to 5:30 p.m. and by appointment. Free. Call (214) 220-2024.

Ludwig Shwartz at Angstrom Ludwig Shwartz presents himself as either the most self-deprecating artist in Dallas or the most pretentious.

For this exhibition, he has installed a storage rack that holds six of his 72-by-72-inch abstract paintings in the main room of the gallery. Only one painting hangs on the wall at a time, but the gallery will switch paintings upon request. Is Mr. Shwartz suggesting that, since these are, after all, merely abstract paintings and therefore the most common commodity on the art market, anyone will do as well as another? Or has he turned the gallery into that sort of couture showroom visited by wealthy men and their mistresses in movies of the 1930s and '40s, hushed and privileged temples of commerce where the goods are individually modeled for potential buyers?

Whichever image Mr. Shwartz is going for - or if he is going for something else altogether - one must deal with the paintings themselves. Each consists of a dripping, spray-painted background sparsely adorned with squares and rectangles, some with patterns suggesting bars or fences, others suggesting Navaho blankets.

Mr. Shwartz's color combinations and his play with positive and negative space show evidence of a keen esthetic sense, but he deploys it with a puritan denial of pleasure and a Spartan endurance for visual pain. These are brilliant and quite unbearable paintings of abstract paintings.

There is also a two-monitor video, *Untitled Diptych (Another Search for the Real)*. Identical but unsynchronized footage of an unremarkable landscape, shot from the window of a speeding car, plays on each monitor. Is the real rushing by so fast we can't see it, is it nowhere to be found, or is it there all along and we just need to admit it? Mr. Shwartz would be the last one to tell. This is an

exhibition to either love or hate or both.

- Charles Dee Mitchell * "902102112, first installment," works by Ludwig Shwartz, continues through Nov. 29 at Angstrom Gallery, 3609 Parry. Hours are Friday and Saturday from noon to 5 p.m. Free. Call (214) 823-6456.

Sherry Owens at Conduit Tree branches, with their outstretched arms and sensuous curves, are perfect tools for sculptors. Dallas artist Sherry Owens, whose works are on view at Conduit Gallery, uses them for varied purposes - to draw in space, weave dense networks and delicate patterns, evoke the spiritual aspects of nature.

The limbs of crape myrtles are her preferred materials, and she is so attuned to their rhythm that the pegs holding them together are almost incidental. But recent attempts in metal are of mixed result - ponderous in the case of a black suspended piece that juxtaposes steel with wood, static in that of a vertical bronze titled Water, yet poetic in a simple bronze ovoid and T-shape that resembles an abstract face.

Known for her sensuous handling of surface, Ms. Owens meticulously strips and sands, burns and waxes - even paints the branches. None of these effects detracts from her ability to play on their natural contours.

But she has a tendency to get bogged down in metaphor, as reflected in the show's title, "beginnings," as in "the beginning of the world." The most expressive works keep metaphysical musings to a minimum - bypass wall texts or overly descriptive titles, for example - and let form, whether evocative of a boat or intertwined figures, speak for itself.

A room-size installation titled Breathe In - Breathe Out is a contrived attempt to let two huge manila "cocoon" function as surrogate humans. Elaborate special effects - a pebble beach, painted sky, an audio of wind and breathing sounds - detract from the forms, which are too shallow to be meaningful symbols.

- Janet Kutner * "Sherry Owens: beginnings" is on view through Nov. 29 at Conduit Gallery, 3200 Main, Suite 25. Hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Free. Call (214) 939-0064.

Rosemary Meza and Steve Cruz at 500X With the title "Saints, Sinners, and Super Luchas," **Rosemary Meza and Steve Cruz** have a lot to live up to. In the long, narrow and usually uninviting upstairs gallery of 500X, they deliver an exhibition packed with humor and vulgar energy. Mr. Cruz is showing a group of paintings, mostly fantastic urban landscapes done in a brightly colored, cartoon style, but his most effective work is also his most straightforward. In Taqueria Dreams, he combines the realistic details of a Mexico City taqueria and its patrons with a sense of erotic fantasy and makes a painting that is both engaging and unexpectedly sexy.

Super Luchas are Mexican wrestling matches, and Mr. Cruz salutes them in a series of small paintings on cardboard he calls "Super Lucha Collectible Cards." He shows the masked wrestlers, with their bulbous upper torsos and, in his version, their comically revealing trunks, stamping in fury and hopping mad. Images of demons, devils and sexy babes appear on other cards, and all make for a good-natured send-up of the macho posturing involved.

Ms. Meza is an artist who goes for strong effects and her version of the Madonna and Child theme will not sit well with the easily offended. The mother who holds her shrunken but fully grown male offspring is presented as both nurturer and castrator, and the evidence of that latter activity forms a kind of throne for the two. This painting, titled Mama, I Will Be Your Superman, manages to be shocking, funny and strangely affecting all at once. The remainder of Ms. Meza's work seems tame in comparison.

In Sorry Feet and Apologetic Butts, enormous nude women drawn in charcoal directly on the wall preside over the dancing, posturing and exploding figures before them. These more life-sized figures are drawn in mixed media on canvas that the artist cuts out and mounts onto boards. Miss Mamacita 1979, sporting an Afro hairdo and wearing only jeans and suspenders, is almost dwarfish but plenty tough. Chuco and Carmen fall all over each other on the dance floor. Hot Tamale Baby is a little too big for her clothes. These are the "saints and sinners" of the exhibition's title, and Ms. Meza depicts them with both an unsparing eye and a big heart.

- Charles Dee Mitchell * "Saints, Sinners and Super Luchas: Work by **Steve Cruz and Rosemary Meza**" continues through Dec. 7 at 500X Gallery, 500 Exposition Blvd. Hours are Saturday and Sunday from noon to 5 p.m. and by appointment. Free. Call (214) 828-1111.

Tom Sale provides comic relief with his Prozac Poodle.

Tom Sale at Gray Matters Tom Sale makes deceptively simple-looking sculptures that aren't so simple after all. Assembled from toy collectibles, his minitableaux celebrate scale while denying its importance and convey subtlety through overstatement.

The format of works on view at Gray Matters is uniform but never completely the same. Tiny players - plastic animals mostly - perch on craggy rocks, enacting absurd dramas indicative of human predicaments.

A minuscule fish flops its way up a mountain in quest of a martini it could never drink. Skeletons pull camper trailers. A dog lies in the middle of a room, torn between the simpler life represented by fireplace logs on one side and the technology of a radiator on the other.

Futility and frustration, indecision and irony - all are recurring themes. And despite the playful quality of the work, dark undercurrents prevail.

Given Mr. Sale's use of found objects, and the narrative appeal of his sculptures, it's easy to overlook the artistry that goes into their creation. Tension results from the imbalance between the tiny objects and the huge rocks. Comic relief is provided by exaggerated gesture and garish color - pink and blue bunnies spilling candy-coated toxic waste, a splayed poodle with its body painted turquoise and white in parody of the Prozac capsules at its feet.

Elsewhere, monochromatic surfaces, some painted and others achieved through the addition of granular substances, contribute to the uniformity of the composition.

- Janet Kutner * "Faithful Companions: New Works by Tom Sale" is on view through Nov. 29 at Gray Matters, 113 N. Haskell. Hours are noon to 5 Saturdays and by appointment. Free. Call (214) 824-7108.

PHOTO(S): 1. Frank X. Tolbert's image crops up in his work, including his Nightfishing. 2. Crape myrtle, used in The Wind in Swirl, is a favorite material of Sherry Owens. 3. Chuco and Carmen is part of **Rosemary Meza's** Sorry Feet and Apologetic Butts. 4. Tom Sale provides comic relief with his Prozac Poodle. 5. Frank X. Tolbert's Roseate Spoonbills (above) explodes on the canvas. Our art critics round up what's hot on gallery walls.; LOCATION NOTE: These photos were not sent to the library for archiving.

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