

Rosemary Meza: Uncomfortable Positions

Mighty Fine Arts

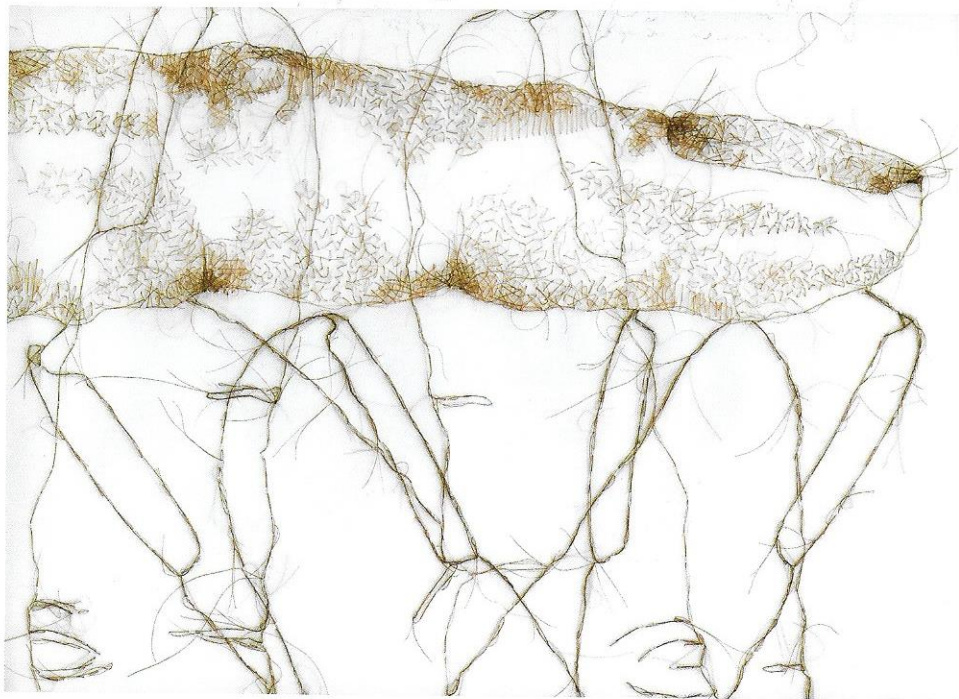
Peggy Heinkel-Wolfe

Last year, Rosemary Meza tackled social and physical discomfort in a site-specific work at El Centro Community College. The lone figure of a woman, caught in an awkward pose, reflected themes that have informed Meza's work for years. A new suite, including a large-scale wall piece, at Mighty Fine Arts communicates a similar sense of discomfort quite powerfully, in part because Meza uses her own hair as the primary medium in a number of works on view.

Meza stands among a small group of artists who employ human hair; however, by using it in place of the drawn line, she differs from the pack. The artist admits to obsessively collecting, sorting and arranging her hair by length and color. She even tints it two shades of brown—one a bit redder than the other—so she can bring subtle tonal differences to her palette. Meza sews hair to canvas, paper and other surfaces, using it as its own form of repetitive mark-making; thus, she is never far from the draftsman's toolkit, shading and shaping in two dimensions. By sewing hair in place of the drawn line, she is able to harness many meanings, both in connection with the act of sewing and the tactile presence of the material at hand. In works like *Keep Your Fingers Crossed*, she focuses—figuratively—on the hand, but her materials communicate remarkable tension. When no longer on the head, individual strands of hair suggest stress in a way that no amount of crosshatching can ever do, alluding to such clichés as “tearing my hair out” or “a hair-pulling experience.”

Unravel the Latest Mistake is, at once, impossibly difficult to follow and an indivisible whole. Its tendrils follow labyrinthine twists and turns yet also hark to a singular, haunting image, perhaps similar in spirit to J. K. Rowling's hapless headmaster who sometimes, in order to save a memory for the future, pulls a single strand from his head for safekeeping outside his weary brain.

Meza also capitalizes on hair's multiple sexual undertones and uses that ambiguity to attract and repel to her advantage. In *Bad Things Come and Go* breasts become eyes, and in *Neither Here Nor There*, a nose becomes a penis. Nebulous biomorphic forms also populate her paintings. In the watercolor *Useless Desires Split Like A Cell*—the title inspired by a Patti Griffin song—Meza scatters a number of ambiguous forms across a large, equally ambiguous landscape. Held together by a



Rosemary Meza, *Invisible Support*, 2006
Hand-sewn human hair on Mylar
9 x 12 inches



Rosemary Meza, *Real, Live, Broken*, 2006
Hand-sewn human hair on Mylar
12 x 9 inches

fleshy palette that could be the inside of a mutant cell or somewhere in the desert, it is an ambitious, deeply personal work. Forms suggest sensual, psychological memories (including reference to her ex-husband, Steve Cruz, who happens to run Mighty Fine Arts).

In a quartet of smaller oil paintings, an unflinching, often painful level of self-reflection connects Meza's work, in a visceral way, to Frida Kahlo's self-portraits. In fact, a natural, neo-surrealist point-of-view helps shorten the leap between Meza's paintings and hair drawings. Kahlo, too, was obsessed with the small, seemingly insignificant symbols and remnants of human existence. Such things help link common themes of pain and suffering—or the lesser but still uncomfortable positions we often find ourselves in at any given time. Both often come at the cost of trying, quite simply, to just get along with each other.