

CANDACE M. BRICEÑO

NEVERMORE



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

JUNE 22 - JULY 29, 2006

AUSTIN, TEXAS

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The act of painting is one of illusion. Particularly before the late 1900's, painting in the West was largely about making pigmented goop look like something in the real, three-dimensional world. Modernist, especially abstract, painting of the last one hundred years points away from this essential fallacy of painting. Rather than picturing reality, these works sought to emphasize the surface, plane and objecthood of paintings. Here, the painting is an object. Candace M. Briceño makes objects, too; moreover, Briceño's objects are perhaps best understood as the direct progeny of such Modernist painting logic. This connection to painting might be hard to notice as Briceño's artwork is rooted in a number of techniques, none of which uses the application of colored adhesive on stretched fabric all that often. These artworks are too physical to create the illusion associated with the preponderance of painting. Rather, Briceño stresses the physicality of painting's surfaces, even using those surfaces as sculptural building materials, to underscore art's inherent limitations in mediating visual experiences through her plucky and ultimately self-sufficient objects.

Though it is true that there is little paint per se in Briceño's work, there is the physical surface on which paint is applied, the support. Paintings' support is most typically linen or canvas stretched across a square, wooden frame, but Briceño also uses paper and felt. When creating an illusionistic painting, the canvas or other material is coated with a priming material that obliterates much of the physical, object-giving information of the support's material self. Successive layers of paint are built atop this foundation to create an illusion of a fruit bowl, field of flowers or some other objects in space. Briceño,



Cherry. 2006, Hand-dyed felt, thread on wire hoop. 4 1/2" x 4" x 3 1/2".

however, employs techniques that emphasize that the support is a piece of fabric. Ultimately, this concentration on the fabric becomes the conduit for moving into entirely three-dimensional objects, but it is easier to trace Briceño's connection to painting by first investigating her work that conforms to comparatively recognizable painting conventions.

Specifically, those works on stretched canvas look the most like paintings. These paintings usually have a minimal pictorial design with much blank canvas. In many of these paintings, a dominate, stuffed fabric element is sewn directly onto the canvas while paint, if used at all, is spread thinly. In an abstract painter's terminology, this thin layer of paint is a stain. Like a grass stain on a pair of trousers, this kind of paint seeps into the fabric support thereby emphasizing the physical existence of the support rather than covering it up. The sewn elements of these works emphasize the physical support by employing a tailor's technique to affix these blistered surfaces onto it. Furthermore, the raised elements bring

the whole image into a low sculptural relief. Here, the canvas is treated like a piece of physical, malleable fabric rather than a stiff blank page, but Briceño draws out plain paper's physicality, too.

Briceño's drawings on paper are made entirely of needle pricks that approximate sewing and also demonstrate the objecthood of the support. In this body of work, Briceño uses a needle as a drawing tool by perforating a design into large sheets of paper. Punched from both the front and back sides of the paper, pricks made from the front of the paper catch the light differently than the ones poked back-to-front. This technique calls attention to the many-sided sculptural reality of the paper whereas a blank sheet of paper, like a painting's support, is usually an empty space for illusory design. This paper is not illusionistic but sculptural.

The rigid surface of the paper permits a sculptural experience mostly limited to rectilinear planes, but actual fabric such as a canvas support possesses a floppy physicality that Briceño explores sculpturally,

too. Like her other square paintings, Briceño has also made works by sewing dyed, cut felt all over a stretched canvas. Besides their higher relief than the other square paintings, these works become even more sculptural when Briceño displays them horizontally. Laying the works on a shelf perpendicular to the wall undercuts the potential illusion that the painting is some window onto a real space. It also exposes height, or depth off the wall, of the support that is the third dimension usually hidden by illusionistic painting.

The techniques Briceño employs to emphasize the physical support in those artworks that closely resemble two-dimensional practices such as painting and drawing carry her into more radically three-dimensional artmaking. A large portion of Briceño's works are wall-mounted, hand-sewn felt sculptures. In these pieces, green discs jut out of the wall while linear elements sprout out their tops. Like the square pieces, the felt is sewn via a paint stain. Displayed one-by-one or sown in a group across an acreage of wall, the works are constructed and hung with enough of an eye to sculptural concerns that they almost entirely outgrow their immediate painting references. Still other plush works have been plucked from the wall altogether. For instance, Briceño's fabric banana peels, titled *Pile*, exemplify her wholly sculptural work.

The felt fruit also points to the central motif that binds all of Briceño's work together. That the works possess a painting pedigree although they are clearly not paintings has been discussed without any mention of Briceño's works' content. This has not been to soft-petal the symbolic potential of their subjects, but rather to highlight the deep connection between Briceño's practice of moving in and out of that content and painting proper. For the artist, these works are a response to

the desire to capture her experiences with the natural world. For instance, the square paintings of *Pond Series* typically picture landscapes: the paint stains are shadows; the puffy appliqués are abstractions of flowers and trees. Pom-pom flower tops bloom from felt stems that spring forth from wire-rimmed pillows of earth in the wall-mounted works. *Piles*' of banana peels are somewhat less abstract variations on their real-world counterparts.

The discarded banana peel, the font of the slapstick pratfall, is also the keenest signifier of humor in the work. Attentive hand sewing might make the work feel precious, fussy or fragile, but their tangible, handmade levity dominates and is key to Briceño's translation of her experiences with nature. Humor is also apparent in the artwork's palette: bright in hue with a highly saturated intensity. The use of brightly colored hand-dyed felt gives the work a plush familiarity. It is as amicable as a puppet. The work is whimsical, almost cartoony. It is not without melancholy, however. Even the charming banana peels exhibit a distinct pathos.

A sense of loss can be noted in all of Briceño's work. In the drawing, *Peel*, the bananas are missing. The wall-mounted pieces, like *Pink Heads*, and *Cherries*, look like abstracted flora, fauna and fungi, but also resemble finely handcrafted display devices from which a precious stone has been removed. The square paintings lack, by and large, paint. Overall, Briceño's practice is missing the look of painting even though it is steeped in that tradition. This sense of loss is integral to the work's content and the artist's intent. Just as loss permeates the work, the project of representing the natural world is as unobtainable for Briceño as it is for painting itself.

Trying to represent one's experience of the natural world is always filled with pathos.

It is a task doomed to failure. Art is, by definition, not the thing it represents but a mediation of it. Modernist painters' fixation on painting's self-aware objecthood exemplified their attempt to privilege artworks' form, and not their illusionistic capacities, as the appropriate territory for art. Briceño's hopscotch among Modernist painterly impulses and more dimensional objects dramatizes the conflict between her desire to capture the experienced world and her awareness that such an illusion is flatly inadequate. Consequently, Briceño has to move away from painting even if she cannot abandon it altogether. The disconnect between real nature and Briceño's art mirrors the disappointment in our awareness of art's inability to adequately match up with reality. Together, these sorrows give Briceño's work its depth, literally, as sculpture, and figuratively as well.

Briceño's use of the seemingly world-wide awareness of mediated forms saves the project from the doom of trying to represent nature. Conceptually, Briceño's work becomes the shared experience of this awareness. Art, at its best, does not so much seek to emulate the real as elucidate it. Briceño's work makes the disappointment of art's fakery not nearly so stinging. With a puffy and vibrant craft, Briceño's work suggests that the inability to fully render experience is a friendlier situation than a vexing one. By spreading their roots in a tradition of physicalizing painting's illusory conceit, the artwork of Candace Briceño is able to transform Modernist self-awareness into an affable and welcoming flowering of a self-assured art.

Jeff M. Ward

Critic-in-residence at the Core Program of the Museum of Fine Arts, Glassell School of Art, Houston, Texas
Executive Assistant for *ArtLies*, Houston, TX



Bloom. 2006

Hand-dyed felt, thread on wire hoop. 9 1/4" x 8 1/2" x 4 1/2"

Candace M. Briceño

Resides in Cedar Creek, TX

EDUCATION

- 2002 Master of Fine Arts, MFA Painting & Drawing The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Chicago, IL
- 2000 Post-Baccalaureate certification. The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Chicago, IL
B.F.A. Visual Arts Education. All level teaching certification. (K-12) The University of Texas at Austin
Study abroad program, The University of Texas at Austin at Castiglione Fiorentino, Italy

AWARDS

- 2005 University of Texas at Tyler Purchase Award for Permanent Collection. Tyler, TX
Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, Award Nominee
ArtPace, short-listed, Residency, San Antonio, TX
- 2004 Joan Mitchell Nominee, MFA Grant Program Award Recipient
Texas Art Prize Nominee, Jones Center for the Arts, Arthouse, Austin, TX
- 2000 Nippon Steel Presidential Award. Chicago, IL
The School of the Art Institute of Chicago Scholarship. Chicago, IL
- 1999 Mexic-Arte Young Latino Scholarship. Austin, TX

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2006 *Nevermore*, Women & Their Work, Austin, TX
Richland Community College, curated by Randall Garrett, Richland, TX
Peel, Mighty Fine Arts Gallery, Dallas, TX
- 2003 The O'Kane Gallery, University of Houston-Downtown, Houston, TX
- 2000 Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center Theatre Gallery, San Antonio, TX

SELECTED GROUP SHOWS

- 2006 *I Use to Believe*, David Castillo Modern & Contemporary Gallery, Miami, FL
I-35 Biennial Invitational, Dunn and Brown Contemporary Gallery, Dallas, TX
Group Show, Studio 107, Austin, TX
Spring Show, Galleri Urbane, Marfa, TX
Selected Texas Artists Exhibit, Austin City Hall, Austin, TX
22 to Watch: New Art in Austin. Touring Dallas Center for Contemporary Art, Dallas, TX, and Galveston Arts Center, Galveston, TX
- 2005 *Casket Factory Art Fair*, Dallas, TX
Chinati Opening, Galleri Urbane, Marfa, TX
22 to Watch: New Art in Texas, Austin Museum of Art, Austin, TX
Texas Biennial exhibit, Bolm Studios, Austin, TX
Selected Texas Artists Exhibit, Austin City Hall, Austin, TX
20th Annual International Exhibition, Juror Michelle Grabner, University of Texas at Tyler,
"9" The Space, Austin, TX
Winter Interim, Studio 107, Austin, TX
- 2004-05 *Gardens Real and Imagined*, Austin Museum of Art - Laguna Gloria, Austin, TX
- 2004 *New American Talent*, curated by Jerry Saltz, Arthouse, Austin, TX
- 2003 *Juror's Choice*, Juror Kate Bonansinga, Women & Their Work, Austin, TX
Gallery 2, *Juried Exhibition*, Chicago, IL
- 2002 *M.F.A. Thesis Exhibit*, Gallery 2, Chicago, IL
Windows Project for The School of The Art Institute of Chicago, Lalique Glass store, Chicago, IL
- 2000 *Visions Show*, A.T. Kearney Corporation, Chicago, IL
Mexic-Arte Young Latino Show, Mexic-Arte Museum, Austin, TX
Graduate SAIC show, Gallery 2, Chicago, IL
USA Exhibition, Nippon Steel Corp., Chicago, IL
- 1999 *Mexic-Arte Young Latino Show*, Mexic-Arte Museum, Austin, TX
Serigraph Project, Coronado Studios, Austin, TX
- 1998 *Fresh Ink*, The Austin Museum of Art, Austin, TX

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2005 *22 to Watch: New Art in Austin*, exhibition catalog, The Austin Museum of Art, Austin, TX
- 2004 Arizona State University, Bilingual Press: *Chicano Art for Our Millennium*. Tempe, AZ
- 2002 Arizona State University, Bilingual Press: *Contemporary Chicano and Chicana Art: Artists' Works Book*. Tempe, AZ
- 1998 *Fresh Ink*, exhibition catalog, The Austin Museum of Art, Austin, TX



This Panel: *Pink Heads*. 2006, Hand-dyed felt, thread on wire hoop. 6" x 4 1/2" x 5".

Cover Panel: *Pile*. 2006, Hand-dyed felt, thread and acrylic. 4 1/2" x 18" x 18".



This Much. 2006, Felt, thread and acrylic. 5'5" x 5'5" x 9".

WOMEN & THEIR WORK

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Now celebrating its 28th anniversary, Women & Their Work presents over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, literature, and film. The gallery features on-going exhibitions of Texas women artists and brings artists of national stature to Texas audiences. Since its founding, Women & Their Work has presented 1,771 artists in 239 visual art exhibitions, 102 music, dance, and theater events, 13 film festivals, 19 literary readings, and 294 workshops in programming that reflects the ethnic and cultural diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in *Art in America*, *ArtForum* and National Public Radio and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from the National Endowment for the Arts. Women & Their Work reaches

over 2,500 school children and teachers each year through gallery tours, gallery talks with exhibiting artists, participatory workshops, in-school performances, dance master classes, and teacher workshops.



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