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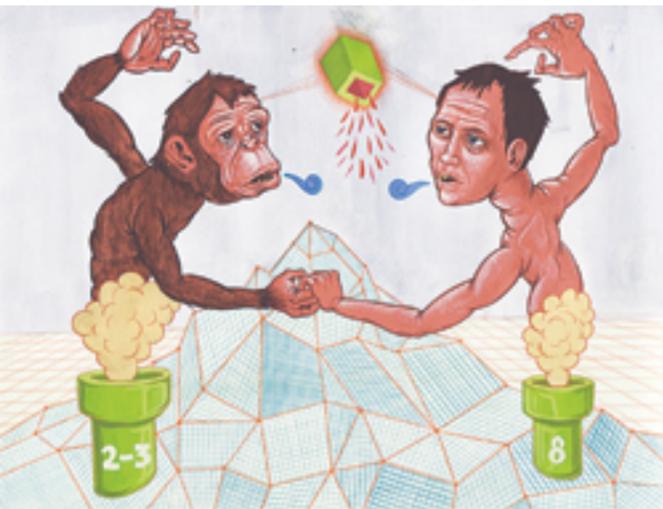
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MONKEY SHINES



COURTESY

The title work by curator (and occasional Current contributor) Enrique Martinez in UTSA Satellite Space's Welcome to the Monkey House.

By Sarah Fisch

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Welcome to the Monkey House at the UTSA Satellite Space is a perplexing and fascinating exhibition, whose mysteries may well haunt me for the rest of my days. The artwork is definitely in keeping with the 1968 Kurt Vonnegut short-story collection of the same name: creepy, deeply dystopian, and oozing with black humor.

Albert Alvarez shocks and awes with three Outsider-esque paintings, their terrifying apocalyptic visions and minute linear detail echoing both the nightmarish political satire and fastidious brushwork of Joe Coleman. Enrique Martinez also presents political allegories in his colored-pencil drawings. His titular image for the show's postcard, in which a man and a monkey re-enact da Vinci's "Creation of Adam," with each figure uttering elegant Mayan-style speech scrolls, is a smart evolutionary punchline. Alex Harrison's series of drawings, illustrating monstrous, befanged thugs menacing a mom outside a Wal-Mart, or sometimes-sinister, sometimes-comical mini-portraits of cartoonish faces, are nonetheless (and ironically) mellifluous and cohesive in composition.

On the 3-D front, Michael Anthony Garcia's installation "Alinado" employs filmy, cut-out suits of transparent plastic which hang from the ceiling, while below, muddled heaps of discarded clothing line the wall, all united by a swirling red ribbon. It's as though the clothes have given up their ghosts ... or perhaps their occupants have been Raptured.

Lucy Flores's three small sculptures, "Better Life," "Worth It," and "Faith Alone," are small, doleful meditations wrought of weathered wood, wire mesh, nails, barbed wire, cloth, and red paint, each bearing a tiny icon — one of la Virgen de Guadalupe, another of the Sacred Heart, and a third of a guardian angel, suggesting the beautiful artificiality of religion amid harsh terrain.

According to a photograph on the gallery wall, Jaime Castillo constructed two elegant and arresting columns of automobile tires, which he printed in white grease with a running human figure. When I saw the show, however, one of these photographed columns appeared to have been almost completely knocked down, black rubber scuff marks on a nearby wall bearing witness to some kind of struggle, maybe? Also, Castillo's name and work titles do not appear on the show's printed list, so I have no idea what, exactly, the titles "Grease Monkey," "Tradeja," and "Oh Well #2" refer to. What's called what? Was the toppling intentional? Monkey business, perhaps? (Forgive me.) The world may never know.

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