

Alfredo Arreguin paints lush mysteries at the Tacoma Public Library's Handforth Gallery

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Work by Alfredo Arreguin, now up at the Handforth Gallery, Tacoma Public Library main branch. Courtesy image.

Alfredo Arreguin sees patterns. The Mexican-born, Seattle-based artist whose work is in the National Museum of American Art and has shown at the Smithsonian Portrait Gallery, paints lush landscapes comprised of patterns – intricate geometrics that hide or reveal larger portraits of animals or people. It's a masterful effect, but the only chance Tacomans have had to see this work lately is at the Tacoma Art Museum, where Arreguin's Frida Kahlo portrait was included in the exhibit about her several years ago. Now the Handforth Gallery at the Tacoma Public Library main branch is full of these mysterious, lush-colored patterns, each mingling Arreguin's Mexican roots with visions of his adopted Northwest home in "Alfredo Arreguin: Selected Paintings."

Staring into each of these paintings is like a journey back and forth along the eye's perspective plane. In "El Arete," for instance (the Kahlo portrait), Frida stares fiercely out with unblinking dark eyes, her lips blood-red, her hair-piece immaculately beautiful. But close-up her curvy outlines and smooth skin are made up of a grid of cross-like flowers and vaguely Native American faces, squares and diamonds alternating with subtly colored outlines. The effect is both wild and tamed, order coming out of chaos, a living person at once assembling from and dispersing into the atoms of the land that produced her. Some people are more assembled than others. In "Terra y Libertad" the heavy-lidded, mustachioed figure is almost buried by the weight of the grinning, reddy-brown faces in his pattern – much clearer are the Mexican/Mayan gods that crouch menacingly in the corners. "Zapata's Messenger," though,

stands proudly out-of-place in his camo-brown suit, assertively real against the elaborate aqua-and-pink tile of the room he's in.

Most beautiful are the nature scenes, jungles of vermillion vines, turquoise trees, swirling yellow and blue waters and birds that leap off the canvas from sheer multihued, multipatterned joy. The forests mix subtropical jungle with cool Northwest green, and deep within their writhing leaves and perching monkeys are faces – “The Jaguar Knight” gazing solemn and threatening, his face spotted like his totem animal; or “Maria Bonita” whose cat-green goddess stare is merciless.

Some are commentaries: Hokusai's “Great Wave” is reversed left to right, with a crescent moon hovering over the white-fingered tsunami, while “Mi Amigo Ray” and “Neruda” use words for their patterns, creating a portrait from poetry.

But the most mysterious of all is the snowy-white “Cholula,” around in the back corridor. Arreguin has painted, with incredible skill and subtlety, a wide grid of faces in white brushstrokes over ochre or pale blue, hiding a shadowed outline that you sense rather than see. Like a magic-eye puzzle with every square inch individually different, the painting lures you in like a mirage in the snow, promising an answer forever out of reach.

“Alfredo Arreguin: Selected Paintings” is on view 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Monday, 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Thursday through Sept. 29. Artist reception 5:30-7:30 p.m. Sept. 13. Free. Handforth Gallery, Tacoma Public Library main branch, 1102 Tacoma Ave. S., Tacoma. 253-292-2001, tacomapubliclibrary.org

Read more here: <http://blog.thenewstribune.com/arts/2012/09/05/alfredo-arreguin-paints-lush-mysteries-at-the-tacoma-public-librarys-handforth-gallery/#storylink=cpy>