

SURFACE TREATMENT

PAINTING CANE

Artist brings life in
the fields to canvas

BY NANCY MOYER

CRUISE TO THE MAMMOTH
paintings done over the past 20 years during his residencies in Mexico and the Caribbean. The focus in this collection zeroes in on the sugar cane workers in Puerto Rico, offering a social commentary on the theme of humanity and labor in a traditional community.

Entering this exhibit from the main entrance, a series of small paintings depict cane fields and rural landscapes. To the far right, a large painting of canes being hauled away gives a successful feeling of completed work. About midway through the show we find heroic paintings of the field workers.

In *The Search for Work*, several paintings are identified as being in San Germán, a city and community in Southern Puerto Rico. The painting, "Machete," zeroes in on the technological level of the community. Here, all we see is the blade, gripped tightly by an anonymous worker demonstrating his superiority over machinery. Landscapes dominate the show in terms of numbers, but the close-up figure paintings of the workers give the exhibit its focus.

Lubben's brush technique ranges from the tight realism seen in "Cane Worker (Female)" to a more impressionistic technique in the landscapes. Quick strokes of paint appear as reflections of sunlight bouncing off the crops and ground debris. "San Germán Cane Field" is an intense painting; its cane fields and path lead the viewer into the distant flames of burning

cane. The painting recalls the scenes of long Clemente due to scale and detail. In the figurative works, the artist has captured the strength and dignity of the female cane worker and the raw physical power of the male worker. The monochromatic paintings of border crossings are shown as empty and forbidding structures. Rendered in black and white, they are bleak and devoid of hope. Lubben says that he added them as symbols of gateways or barriers to finding work.

Lubben received his MFA degree from the Instituto Allende in San Miguel de Allende and taught at the Inter American University of Puerto Rico.

"I lived in Puerto Rico next to a cane field," he said, "and I was fascinated with how hard the sugar cane workers worked. The time I have spent living in and among Hispanic communities throughout the United States, Mexico and Caribbean has had a critical influence on my work throughout the last two decades."

Lubben is an Associate professor of Visual Arts at South Texas College, the founder of the Annual Human Rights Art Exhibition, and 2013 Fulbright Scholar at the Human Rights Research and Education Center, University of Ottawa, Canada.

Nancy Moyer, Professor Emerita of Art from UTPA, is an art critic for The Monitor. She may be reached at nmoyer@rgu.rr.com



"Machete"



LUBBEN

THE SEARCH FOR WORK, Art Exhibition by Richard Lubben

WHERE: Lobby Gallery, McAllen Public Library, Nolana Loop and 23rd St.

WHEN: Until Mar. 2,

Library hours

CONTACT: (956) 681-3000



"Cane Worker (female)"



"San Germán Cane Field"