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Dalí on Display

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A traveling exhibition of works by Spanish Surrealist Salvador Dalí is a great undertaking for a prominent Kansas City gallery. It also introduces conflicting ideas on how to absorb the intent.

The Leedy-Voukos Art Center is hosting Salvador Dalí: The Argillet Collection. While the show cannot be called a retrospective, the gallery does display approximately 80 works, broken out by series. These include works from Dalí's Suites, such as *Mythologie*, *Les Hippie*, *Goethe's Faust* and *Poemes Secret d'Apollinaire*. "This exhibition and collection opportunity" of prints, etchings and original drawings has also traveled to cities including Houston, Tx., Woodland Hills, CA. and Tampa, Fla.

The Collection is the result of a five decades-long friendship and professional relationship between Salvador Dalí (1904-1989) and his publisher, Pierre Argillet (1910-2001).

Argillet's daughter, Christine, (as did the entire family), knew Dalí well, and now owns the collection along with her brother. In an email exchange between their publicist, myself and the CEO of the company touring this collection, "There were originally about 200 works in the collection...Pierre Argillet published the entire collection, and consequently (Madame) Argillet inherited them upon his passing."

I was also told it is Argillet's intention to "present as much of the entire collection as possible. Ms. Argillet wants this to be viewed by as many people as possible and not necessarily for the revenue factor alone." A reasonable belief to uphold, but it is confusing to undergo an appreciation of these works when they are already framed with prices and financing options listed right on the art cards. It creates an environment where values and estimates overrides appreciation and desire.

As to the work itself, Dalí's somewhat corrupted lifestyle, polysexual attitudes, Renaissance influences, obsessions, anxieties, cathartic beauty and fears of impotence are all represented here, albeit on a somewhat smaller scale than his more familiar paintings. It cannot be denied when looking at *Pegasus* or *Medusa*, these hallmark styles are very present. One can also discover early uses of gold aerosol (Pagoda), a precursor, perhaps, to the legitimacy of street art. From the same *Les Hippie* series, is a personal favorite, "Flower Women at the Piano." The draping of one woman's gown, bouquets for heads and Dalí's oft-used dramatic perspective are beautifully represented. Examples such as this are found throughout the Collection if you're willing to look carefully.

On one hand, Leedy-Voukos Art Center located in the city's Crossroads Arts District, is a perfect setting to see so much work by one artist in one space. Founded in 1985 by internationally recognized artists Jim Leedy and Peter Voukos, the space is instrumental in helping to rejuvenate a once down-at-the-heels neighborhood into the city's thriving art hub.

On the other hand, their elaborate and somewhat gaudy gold frames are so over the top, and so precisely arranged, this slickness and uniformity inhibits a *gemütlich* experience. It feels like looking in a book while someone else turns the pages.

Another question to ask in this art-smart town; how does this particular exhibition elevate the dialogue that is so important to our city? Kansas City is a place that has long provided eloquent discourse from forward-thinking artists of all ages and disciplines. This exhibition seems to not be in step with the conversation that many current artists, both local and otherwise, are holding, and being shown around the city, including Leedy-Voukos Art Center themselves. For example, at the H&R Block Artspace there is a Kansas City Art Institute faculty exhibit that is wowing viewers, showing work that includes Anthony Baab, Misty Gamble, David Steele Overholt and Carla Malone Steck, among others. Smaller artist-run spaces like PLUG projects, are also advancing the discussion of today's views on contemporary art in the city.

Dalí's legacy in the pop culture lexicon cannot be denied; cartoons, horror movies and the like all bear some of his influence. If not an offering of masterpieces, the Argillet Collection is still nice to view up close, which is the stated intent.

This, however, is where such an exhibition bears considerable confusion to the viewer, myself included. Imploring us to pay homage to the Dalí legacy by owning them too seems a little grotty. It confers a pretense that places the audience in a contradictory situation and is a legitimate complaint from artists and devotees alike. Economics sits alongside aesthetics when all one hopes to do is enjoy the work.

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