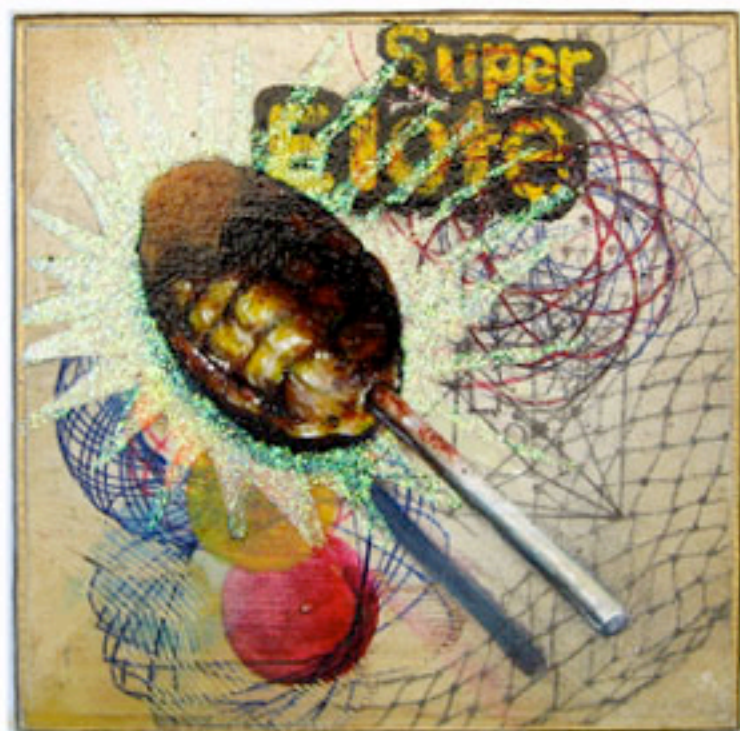


Mitsy Ávila Ovalles at Rowan Morrison.



Mitsy Ávila Ovalles' paintings beg a few questions. How much do we owe the past? And how much should we really care about Monchhichi, La Bombita or Pedrito Fernandez?

A technically proficient painter, this San Jose artist, now in her late twenties, mines the huge mound of mostly Mexican pop-cult artifacts that began accumulating shortly after her birth. Her multi-layered

paintings are emblazoned with images of C-level movie stars, sports figures, sexual dysfunction-spokesmen, and pop singers. Another popular subject in her work is street food like elote (roasted corn on a stick). The paintings' cultural miasma is held together by Ovalles' wonderfully grimy process of layering images, scraping down sections, repainting, scraping down some more, scratching into the surface, and burnishing with varnishes.

What it comes down to is that Ovalles has a really long attention span and a tremendous reverence for pop culture. You probably know **JuanGa** (Juan Gabriel)--the big-hearted, big-selling Mexican pop singer—who shows up in one of Ovalles' works, young and handsome, dressed to the nines. **Menudo** appears in another. But you may not know **Pedrito Fernandez**, the former child star and singer who was dissed by Pope John Paul II and recently helped promote McDonald's to Latinos. Or, for that matter, **Lyn May**, the burlesque dancer and 70s sexploitation star. All are rendered in a faux naïve style that echoes the hand-painted anonymous work seen on the sides of **taco trucks** or on **bodega signage**.

Because the average viewer cannot catch all the namechecking, attempting to resurrect someone from the dustbin of history does not always make viewing Ovalles' work easy. Her paintings are like watching a Tarantino movie--even on a good day, you're not gonna catch all the references, but go with it, because it's all about honoring and knowing our shared recent past. And when you can do that

about honoring and knowing our shared recent past. And when you can do that, you inevitably end up knowing a little bit more about yourself and today.

Through February 2 at Rowan Morrison Gallery.

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