

# Contemporary Realism of Vilas Tonape

by SONI MARTIN

Vilas Tonape, like so many art professors in academe, wants students in his advanced painting and drawing classes to explore ways to “find their voice” as a visual artist. Yet, first, they must undertake the disciplined rigors of developing the skill sets and techniques of working from observation in his introductory classes.

Explore evidence of Tonape’s teaching philosophy at Galley 208 while visiting *Contemporary Realism of Vilas Tonape*. This is his first one-man exhibit in the region. The exhibit hangs from Nov. 10, 2015 to Jan. 30, 2016. The show clearly demonstrates his qualifications for teaching the foundations of a



classical figurative approach; while his personal work, as an artist, transcends descriptive painting as simple technique.

Six years of undergraduate studies in art school prepared him for the rigors of observation yet meaning in the work is his response to the subject. Each of the works in the exhibit is a point of departure for viewers to experience his keen sense of beauty and dignity and the subtle uniqueness of the portrait and the still life as a subject.

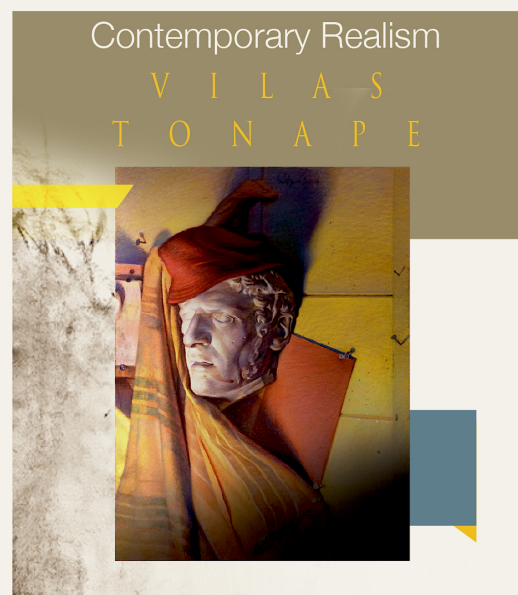
Recently hired as the Chair of the Department of Art at Methodist University, Gallery 208 will introduce him to the artistic community and patrons of the arts during the artist’s reception on Nov. 10, from 5:30 to 7:00 p.m. The public is invited to attend the reception and hear a brief presentation by this artist who brings a multicultural view to the educational and artistic community.

After earning his BFA in painting at the Sir J.J. School of Art at the University of Bombay in Bombay, India, his instructors urged Tonape to go abroad and study. He took their advice and was pleased to receive a full scholarship in the MFA program at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas. After graduation in 1996, he taught in various colleges, to include the geographic regions of Colorado, Florida, Idaho and Georgia. His professional teaching history includes being an instructor at the Amory Center in West Palm Beach, Fla., and “visiting artist” at Ringling School of Art and Design in Sarasota, Fla.

Visitors to *Contemporary Realism of Vilas Tonape* will quickly acknowledge his skillfulness; but, with all good realism, it is important to take the time to look at each work carefully, to look beyond proficiency. Each work has meaning for the artist; it is the viewer’s undertaking and pleasure to pause for meaning to be revealed. The artist is communicating to us through his choices: his mark making, the way he applies paint, tone and light, the silence of a color, the stillness of a space within the composition, the composition itself. With all the options an artist has to choose from, during observation what the artist includes and leaves out reflects their intent — their personal interpretation, vision and perceptions to share with us.

The works of Tonape are best described by the philosopher Benedetto Croce, “intuitive knowledge is expressive knowledge.” How Tonape constructs each work is the starting point for how he unifies his response to his subject. Where Croce is concerned with the idea and the nature of beauty, Tonape talked about how each character (portrait) means something to him, “they are individual personalities. After I meet someone I know immediately there is a personality I want to draw or paint, it is the spirit of an individual that I want to capture and share.”

Tonape is obviously a colorist and talks about his color palette in ways that reveal his system and his philosophy about color. “Color is based on my observation. Viewers might think it is subjective, but for me it is objective. These are the colors, the hues and tones I perceive that day. So, I don’t feel as if I am exaggerating or being subjective. And the value white! You will not see white in my paintings, in other words, no pure white without hue; every tone



has its own color. I don’t think there is anything in nature that is hue-less.”

With so much photographic software in the market place, in academe, and cell phone photography, why would an artist still work from life? Tonape stated: “That’s how I was trained and I feel that is how it should be done — to see all the colors in the face. A camera cannot capture what I see in the face and I am able to see those colors! As well, from an academic standpoint, I am viewing something three-dimensional through observation, translating it into a two-dimensional surface and then back to an illusion of the three-dimensional. That is an experience, for me, it doesn’t take place in a photograph — in addition to the color factor.”

Working in a variety of mediums, Tonape is exhibiting charcoal and graphite drawings, pastel on paper, oil paintings and watercolors. No matter what the medium, he is always a mix of classicism and realism. He deliberately limits what we see, often leaving large areas of negative space as a place of visual rest, a way to emphasize color, or an approach to call attention to the object or portrait. Ever-present in each work, the complexity of form and three-dimensionality gives way to a directional or diagrammatic line. Either implicit or explicit, line leads the viewer around the composition or to a focal point. Line is an ever-present underlying structure throughout each work, an artistic strategy used to direct us or contrast with the volume in the work.

A realist artist most often focuses on the world of people and places around them, but they also communicate and express something about how they perceive the world. After leaving the exhibit visitors will easily remember Tonape as an artist who views a world filled with grace, a sense of humor, beauty and dignity — a world of harmony.

The public is invited to the opening and reception Nov. 10, from 5:30 - 7 p.m. Gallery 208 is open Monday-Friday, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. during the duration of the exhibit and is located at 208 Rowan Street, in historic downtown Fayetteville. For information about the reception or exhibit, call 910.484.6200. Visit Vilas Tonape’s website at <http://www.vilastonape.com>.

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