

EYE ON ART

Thought-Provoking Images Spark Coffeehaven Exhibit

By Rae Anne Robinett
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Art, for as many ways as it can be defined and has been re-defined, can still communicate powerful visual messages about our culture, our values and our shortcomings.

The most lasting and impressive images are often those that can't be easily resolved, making us angry and making us think. In their latest exhibition at Coffeehaven Coffeehouse, "ARTillery: A Terrible Beauty," curators Joe Flazh! and Maria D'Ambrosio once again present a socio-politically charged, thought-provoking look at visually different, though conceptually similar, work of two artists, Abel Alejandro and Chris Lee.

The "ARTillery" show (besides having a great name) takes us on a tour of the ambiguous nature of our cultural best intentions and the confounding element of our all-too-human free will. Painter Abel Alejandro and photographer Chris Lee explore with poignancy and humor the difficulty of representing the ambiguous nature of human social and emotional struggle.

The art of "ARTillery" tries to represent the hard questions of triumph and struggle with no

clearly defined winners. We're all trapped. And as Sartre once said, "Hell is other people." There seems to be, conveyed by Alejandro and Lee, a clear sense of futility and absurdity in the grand and ridiculous manner of the playwright Samuel Beckett.

Abel Alejandro's monumentally sized, oil-on-canvas paintings are arresting hung high up on Coffeehaven's east wall. In this position, they are impossible to take in all at once, and there is no space into which you can comfortably locate yourself to claim mastery over them. You have to slowly scan up, down, and across to begin the narrative cycle of Alejandro's paintings. The six paintings are from his series entitled "Series II: Still Light."

Executed in black and white monochrome, the figures that exist in Alejandro's "Still Light" series have arms raised in protest, victory or shackled in slavery. The figures' heads are wrapped for religious beliefs, concealment or perhaps bound in prisons of powerless anonymity. It's funny how easily one can be mistaken for the other. Alejandro's paintings compose a narrative cycle of energy begin-

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ning with a catalyst (for Alejandro, this could be fate or vengeance) and ending, temporarily, with entropy. This painter's cycle is ongoing and plays out its drama in the microcosm of our minds and the macrocosm of global politics.

Photojournalist Chris Lee has captured, in black-and-white photos, biting and telling moments from a cross-cultural continuum of hope and despair. Traveling the world from Los Angeles to China with a sensitive and humorous eye, Lee exposes human beings and their complexly simple desire for peace and the good life — that always seems just beyond reach.

Lee's most amazing photos (but then again, I'm biased) are those of Americans (Californi-

ans, to be exact) engaged in the messy pursuit of living. Captured are images of Americans from an Israel Solidarity Rally in L.A.; at a Muslim anti-violence protest in Orange County; holding vigil at the Long Beach World Trade Center on Sept. 14, 2001; the Stonewall Initiative protesting outside the Boy Scouts' Sea Base in Newport Beach; a homeless man covered in plastic bags outside the L.A. Sports Arena; a man in a moment of solitary contemplation in the middle of a harsh and desolate freeway-scape, entitled "Under Pressure 1." The images are as diverse as we are numerous.

"ARTillery: A Terrible Beauty" runs through Dec. 29, and is guaranteed to put hair on your chest. Coffeehaven Coffeehouse is located at 1708 E. Broadway. For details, call 437-3785.