

Artist Bio

written by Rob Perree for the Tembe Fu Libi (Moengo Festival of Visual Arts)

The world of American artist Steve Banks is that of Star Wars, Dunkin' Donuts, McDonald's and comic strips. It is that popular culture with which he is preoccupied. And critically so. He urges the observer to relate to it and to also have an opinion about it.

The shape into which he pours that world is remarkable. Basically it's paintings that he makes, but they seem to be more constructions, 3-dimensional collages, or assemblages. They are literally layered. They sometimes make me think of aerial views of pinball machines. The images are playful distortions of reality just as comic strip characters are distorted. Words often play as much a role as images. The "canvasses" are surrounded by ornamental, burgundy frames which form a part of the total image. The characters, objects, symbols, and texts seem to be arbitrarily placed upon a foundation. As if they have been sprinkled there. This gives rise to varying relations and contrasts, depending on the manner in which the work is viewed by the observer. It is strange that Banks' work – often large – makes a timeless impression, while the subject matter is very actual, and in fact, relates to the present. That is because he mixes his imagery with visual elements that give rise to memories of traditional African cultures, to pre-Columbian visual elements or of visual elements regularly found in Folk Art. He most likely consciously creates that confusion because it is a way of attracting the attention of the viewer, keeping him/her focused on the subject.

In fact, he also does that by using the means of seduction. The whole lot of characters, colors, letters, shapes, as well as materials, often form an aesthetic totality. Even the viewer who is not interested in the content would feel attracted to the original beauty of Banks' work.