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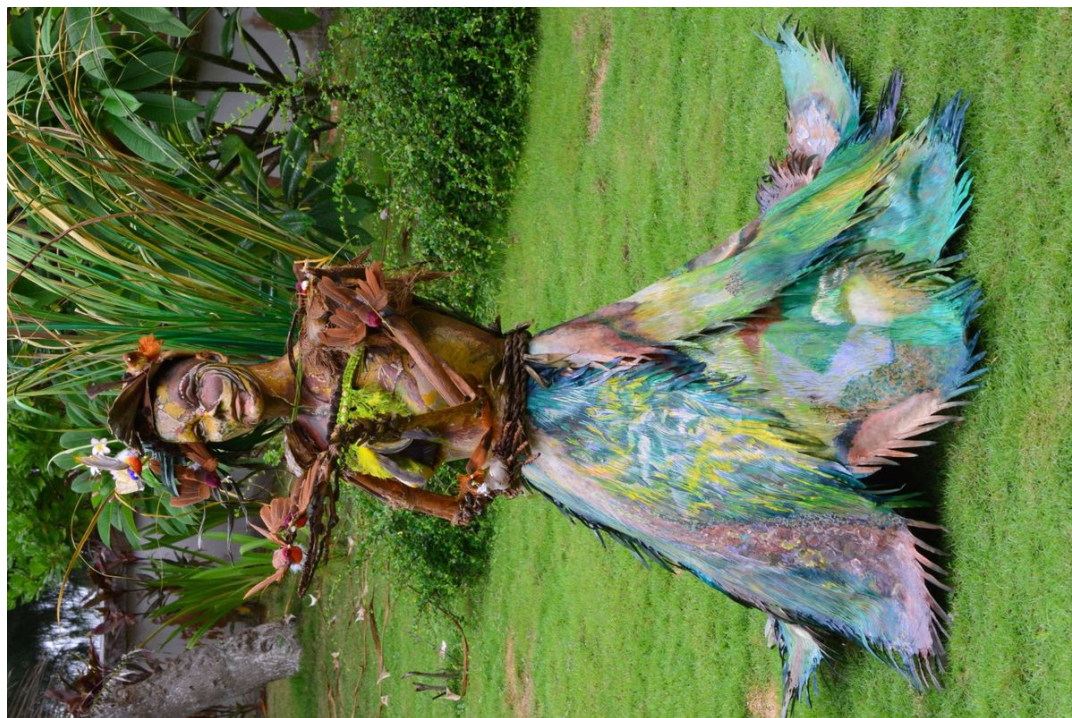
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Sunday Post | Art Femininity and feminism

Dawn Reyes' new art exhibit coming up CAHA

Johanna Salinas | For the Sunday Post Updated 17 hrs ago



"Savanah," 2016, acrylic on found objects, by Dawn Reyes

Dawn Reyes opened a file on her laptop. It was her painting of a ko'ko' bird eating butterflies as it stepped on an invasive brown tree snake. "The snake's still a danger, but the bird carries on with eating the beautiful butterflies," she said.

Some might look at this piece and just see animals in a jungle, yet Reyes has a message in the painting: "Chamorro culture has been tainted by outside people." Though not born on Guam, Reyes has embraced the Chamorro life and island environment.

Reyes has been living on Guam for 17 years and married to the culture for 35 years. "I'm not a girl from California anymore, I'm from Guam now," she said.

Her yearning to understand and promote the Chamorro culture is evident in her artworks that will be exhibited from Aug. 5 to 23 at the CAHA Gallery in Hagatna. Her exhibit will feature her works from the Festival of the Pacific Arts along with newer works.

A statue called "Savannah" is a new piece she is excited to showcase. "She's around 4 feet tall, based on found objects and acrylic paint," Reyes said. "I was inspired by these hills in Inarajan, where I walk my dogs. It represents the beauty of Guam and goes back to the connection of people with the land. A lot of the times I use female figures because of the way that females connect to things is interesting and important to me as a female artist."

By personifying Guam's nature, Reyes reveals her curiosity for the land and her yearnings to be a part of it.

Her statue also pays tribute to Chamorro women and their importance to Guam's society. "I'm looking at the concept that Guam's a matrilineal society," Reyes said. "The female figure is important when doing work about Guam. Savannah is a female figure but to say that she's specifically a person; I didn't have that in mind. You could relate her to me because we have similar facial features but you can also relate her to Guam as female entity or as Fu'una." Womanhood is a reoccurring concept in many of Reyes's works. "I've been interested in what femininity is and what feminism is and what goddesses are. I've explored those ideas many years ago."

Her thoughts on femininity and her love for Guam are evident in her works to be exhibited. "Sirena" is a piece that combines womanliness and Chamorro culture. The painting represents a personal perspective of the Chamorro legend, yet some have criticized that figure isn't a true mermaid because she has legs. Still it's important to give life to ancient tales because they are a part of the Chamorro spirit. "It's essential to any culture that the arts are celebrated," Reyes said. "It's important to the people of Guam, to the people of anywhere. It's an expression of beliefs and values and anything the people feels that they have to share."

Reyes is also the author of several children's books including "Sirena" and "Patgon Ni Tuma'yok Desde Guahan Esta Luta (The Boy Who Leaped to Rota)."

Art is a form of healing for Reyes. "It's like meditating. Your mind goes into another place," she said. "I don't know how that works but it does."