

## Francisco Salas at Portrait Society and Walker's Point Center for the Arts

Family and formative art experiences in two-gallery exhibit

By Kat Murrell • April 21, 2015



It feels familiar, this room with wood paneling, cabaret tables and old leather stools. There is a painting of a jukebox and a canvas proclaiming in neon "Salas Eat." Seriously elegant velvet paintings are on the walls and the boxes from Brenner Brewing are not just leftovers from the exhibition opening. They are part of the installation at Portrait Society Gallery for Rafael Francisco Salas' "Wasted Days and Wasted Nights."

The title might sound like a lament of regret, but is really more lyrical. It comes from a song by Tejano musician Freddy Fender and echoes the music Salas grew up with in rural Wisconsin. A fuzzed-out soundtrack plays in the background, adding atmosphere that recalls the restaurant in Wautoma belonging to his Mexican American grandparents. There is a lot of biography in this exhibition with influences of family and formative art experiences.

This is running concurrently with a complementary exhibition at Walker's Point Center for the Arts. The WPCA portion is more traditional, featuring large paintings, drawings and forays into three-

dimensional work. The front gallery is dominated by a life-sized representation of Fender, dressed in a white suit and decorated like a shrine with flowers, fruit and glitter. He metaphorically gazes across the room to a sculpture of a lamb resting on a platform. The animal is a reference to the farm run by Salas' family and modeled after the sacrificial lamb in Jan and Hubert van Eyck's Ghent Altarpiece (1432).

Charcoal and acrylic works reflect Salas' predilection for dreamlike scenes inspired by landscape and rural life. He has a quiet, poetic manner of investing recognizable but strange forms with an elegiac beauty, synthesizing experience and imagination with intriguing mystery.

For best effect, see the exhibitions in both venues. Visitors to Portrait Society will also be treated to new paintings by Shane Walsh in "12th Wave Utopia." Working with black, white and accents of silver, Walsh executes an untold number of techniques in mark making while maintaining a deft adherence to pure abstraction. Both artists offer exciting contemporary approaches to the age-old practice of painting.

"Rafael Francisco Salas: Wasted Days and Wasted Nights" continues through May 16 at Walker's Point Center for the Arts (839 S. Fifth St.) and through May 23 with "Shane Walsh: 12th Wave Utopia" at Portrait Society Gallery (207 E. Buffalo St., fifth floor).