

The Paintings of Herman Aguirre

by *Tony Phillips*, 2019

Herman Aguirre is endowed with extraordinary talents that provide strong impetus towards his work as a painter. His art is thoroughgoing – fully physical and painterly. Yet his touch is subtle. His ideas are inextricably fused into the paint, sealed within his process. He loves the heft, the stuff of paint, the struggle to whip the thick of it into an image. He is not only the author but the editor of his work—revising, scraping, subtracting and adding yet again, wrestling it into the right resolve. It is always a trial for him to find resolution, yet his inherent sense of structure, his tools and skills and his drive towards consummation all add up to a power that will hardly be denied. He is utterly compelled to wrangle the rawest substance into his distinctly robust vision.

There is an inherent rhythm to his muscular actions which are clearly visible within the paint. One can readily see the fabric of nature in his work, both in these actions themselves and with what nature he envisions through these actions - vision and action as one. Herman may also fuse other materials into his work but doing so with respect to the rhythm and feel of the paint, with full regard to its integrity. Herman's earlier work had been more abstract but, as he has matured, his interests have required more specifically realized imagery – figures, faces, objects, landscape - altogether suggesting and even describing situations which reflect circumstances within and surrounding his life.

Herman has lived in a tough Mexican neighborhood where his friends, even family, have been subjected to mayhem, here in Chicago and in Mexico. Herman is appalled, and his best work shows it. Among his most extraordinary paintings: a broad canvas dense with paint, a landscape with a foreground that suggests a road-side tangle of foliage and trash, and in there, not so immediately apparent, folded into the general melange, one may discern a dismembered corpse, the result of a drug war. The effect is like the experience of having made an actual discovery somewhere in Mexico, or maybe in a field here – real and disturbing, hardly didactic, but essential and experiential. His recent paintings lean further into specificity, not polemical as such, but more insistently exposing yet more potent evidence of those distinct realities that inform his life as well as the lives of people everywhere where there is dire social upheaval. The paintings are in no way ironic; they are direct - revealing circumstances. One may be reluctant to engage these realities, but Herman seduces us by way of his powerful visual language, his handling of gorgeous paint and allied materials.

Herman has terrific ambition, the best kind – an intense motivation to communicate what he sees going on in and around his life – horrific events that he needs to address. He intuitively conveys what he feels about these matters, doing so with no use of commonplace signifiers. He fully considers all the working options for what he means to say. He looks hard and works deep, sweating out the goods. He is an artist whose work is the measure of his life.