

DANIA BEACH

Two S. Florida artists find common ground

Well-known artists with a common link to Overtown are sharing exhibit space at a downtown Dania Beach cafe and gallery.



Two great South Florida artists tied to Overtown, Purvis Young and Ferdie Pacheco, met fans and sold artwork during an joint art show opening of their works March 7 at Grace Cafe and Galleries in Dania Beach.

EILEEN SOLER / FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

Two of South Florida's most storied artists, Purvis Young and Ferdie Pacheco, are worlds apart in style but anchored in experiences from the gritty streets of Overtown.

Through April, they will share the spotlight at the Grace Cafe & Galleries in Dania Beach.

"We are blessed," said Josie Mijares of Aventura at a recent reception for the artists.

Young, 66, is a self-taught urban artist who found his calling in the mid-1960s after serving a prison term for breaking and entering. He said he was turned around when an angel told him, "This is not your life."

Back at home in Overtown, Young painted murals on the back walls of a row of buildings.

Discarded doors, other wood pieces, found objects and cardboard were used then and now to paint hundreds of stylized pictures of the angel that guided his life, horses that remind him of his freedom and faceless human figures -- free at last.

MOMENT OF SOLITUDE

At the Grace Cafe & Galleries, owned by Clare Vickery of Fort Lauderdale, Young sat quietly, alone and dozing in a wheelchair surrounded by more than 50 of his works. Every so often, the artist, once profiled on *Geraldo at Large* and the subject of an award-winning documentary, dipped into his coat pocket to sneak a Cheetos cheese puff.

"I come alive at night. That's when I do most of my painting," he said before closing his eyes again.

To honor the artist's solitude, fans walked softly through Young's installation, as if each piece communicated private messages of peace, hope and unity.

"His works are Overtown painted on bits and pieces of the place. There is a crude realism to his work that strikes me," said Karen Levenstein of Delray Beach, who bought an angel on clapboard for \$300.

Pacheco, 81, a retired physician and ringside doctor to legendary boxers, including Muhammad Ali, held court just yards away to a boisterous crowd that gave positive commentary on Pacheco's vibrant depictions of Overtown's cultural heyday.

Originally of Ybor City near Tampa, Pacheco started a medical practice in Little Havana after earning a medical degree from the University of Miami. Later, he joined boxing trainer Angelo Dundee's corner at the famous 5th Street Gym.

Works by Pacheco include Ali entering the ring, action in the famous gym, Florida A&M University's legendary marching band, jitterbugging at the Sir John Club, and Sunday services at a local church.

And there, among nearly 40 pieces, is proof that the octogenarian doctor, painter and author of 13 books is not slowing down.

Barack Obama, post-election, is Pacheco's most contemporary subject.

"Art is what I do," Pacheco said.

Boxing fan Chris Moussally of Palm Beach said he has followed Pacheco's career as a fight doctor and boxing commentator more than the careers of fighters.

"It's a little overwhelming to see him so diverse as a writer and artist, too," Moussally said.

LATEST BOOK

The process server, who is originally from New York, bought a copy of Pacheco's latest book, *Blood in My Coffee*, and a framed photograph of Ali and Pacheco ringside.

Young, slowed by complications from diabetes that led to a kidney transplant, is also still creating art. A table at the Grace Cafe brims with unframed paintings on paper and a sketchbook that bulges with his newest works.

"I am guided by my mind," Young said.