



"Messenger" by local artist Shanti Conlan, who hangs new works at the Jung Center through Oct. 28

THE CORNERS OF HER MIND

Local artist Shanti Conlan draws upon memories and mysteries to create compelling pieces on display at the Jung Center this month.

By Chris Kelly

"There were double rainbows, the constant sound of waves and near-miss hurricanes, during which my mother wondered if she could fit me into Tupperware to float," says Shanti Conlan. The 45-year-old Houston artist recalls her exotic birthplace of Micronesia—the child of two Peace Corps volunteers—as she opens a new exhibit at the Jung Center this month. And when it comes to Hurricane Harvey, she notes how the Houston community has come together, and how her work often deals with forces in nature and the effects of water on the land. The abstract artist's immediate connection to nature was not only literal, but figurative as well. "My middle name is Lijakwe, a Micronesian sea deity—a mythological princess so beautiful that when she goes into the water, it changes colors." It's a fitting name for Conlan, who has a deep connection with nature, thick glossy brown hair, high cheekbones and a radiant smile, all worthy of a goddess.

Eventually her family moved to Houston where Conlan attended the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts. "It was not just about surviving high school, but even occasionally relishing it," she says with a laugh. Conlan went on to earn her B.F.A. at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. After moving around, she decided to return to Houston, drawn by family and the incredibly diverse and empowering art community.

The solo show includes 30 captivating works, a collection of both paintings and mixed-media presentations. Conlan's pieces often have seemingly random marks that "represent the many objects I was so fascinated with collecting as a child—small sticks, oddly shaped rocks, feathers, shells. The remnants left by the actions of nature."

There is one series of ethereal blue images that Conlan says are space and cloud formations. Many might look at them and think of the ocean or sky, which is fine by the artist. Though she calls her work "memory maps" drawn upon her childhood in the Pacific, they are equally reminiscent of the Gulf of Mexico. "My works are up to interpretation—exploring and capturing primordial things that are happening, but not knowing exactly what's going on. It's about the mystery and not final answers."