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## Revisiting Landscape Art

Reinvented Nature Visions Inform 'New Landscapes Part II,' at Santa Barbara City College's Atkinson Gallery

By Josef Woodard

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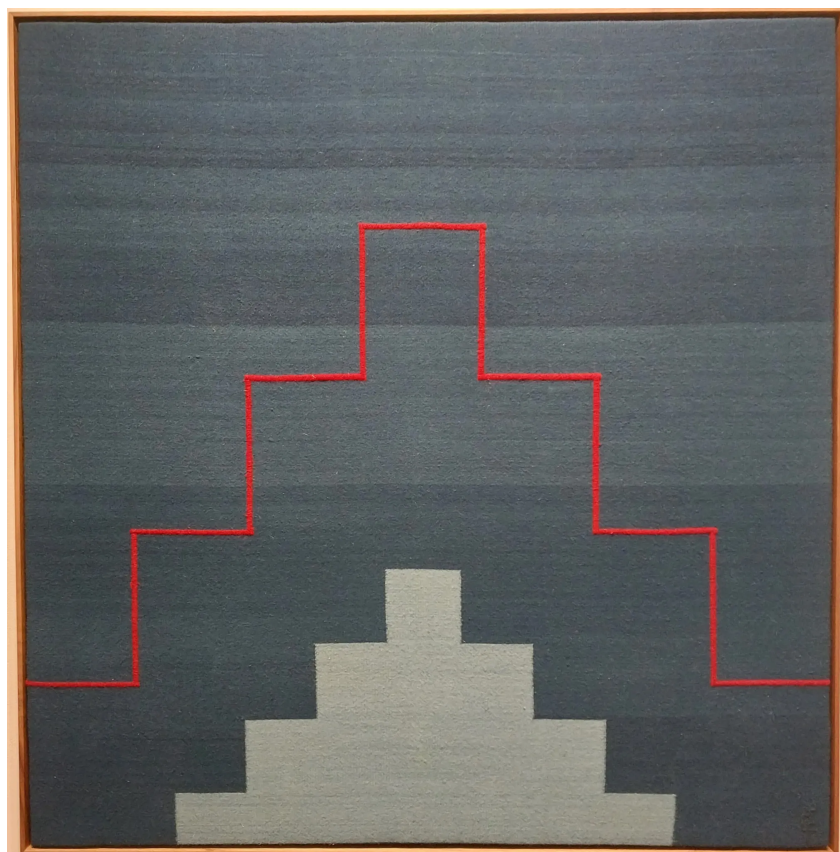


*'Yellow Horizontal Promise' - Ann Craven | Credit: Josef Woodard*

Our earthly home lays out her natural splendor beneath a cloud of impending peril. This much we know in the era of climate crisis awareness, which may increase an innate desire to retreat to and bask in nature's beauty and awe. Her current vulnerability can spur us into idealistic action — see the San Marcos Foothills and Carpinteria Bluffs for recent local examples.

Under such circumstances, art about nature can take on new meaning, forms, and agendas. Such as an underscoring theme of the exhibition *New Landscapes Part II*, the second of a two-part series now at SBCC's Atkinson Gallery. Not incidentally, the Atkinson is blessed with an inspiring, harbor-facing view from its outdoor patio perch. Nature calls with a sweet, sweeping song.

Eco-dread aside, the current selection of artworks curated by director John Connelly doesn't dwell on environmental anxieties, at least not explicitly. Some of the reference points and rebel rubs have to do with reframing old-school definitions of landscape art, centuries deep. In some cases, nods to nature coexist with stylistic twists influenced by abstract schools of expression, minimalist, funky, and otherwise.



*'Untitled Continuous Line' – Porfirio Gutierrez | Credit: Josef Woodard*

Ann Craven's "Yellow Horizontal Promise" consciously cross-hatches pictorial approaches, contrasting the sharply realistic image of a western bluebird perched on a branch with a screaming yellow backdrop and a dreamy flotation of hazy, dematerialized visual gestures. The crisp aviary protagonist is juxtaposed against a vaporous setting.

Post-minimalist notions are seen in David Benjamin Sherry's "Winter Eclipse (New Mexico)," composed of minute variations of light blue, with subtle shapes only hinting at Southwestern geology rather than spelling out the forms. Similarly, in Porfirio Gutiérrez's fabric art piece "Untitled, Continuous Line," tiered pyramidal shapes echo Southwestern plateaus and buttes, as well as Meso-

American architecture. From a different angle, its orderly linear quality could be read as design for art's sake.

Fabric art combines medium self-reference and landscape imagery in Jordan Nassar's "A Sun Toward the Sea," made of hand-embroidered cotton on cotton, covered with decorative leaf-like patterning, with a sly splash of landscape tucked into the far-right edge.

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Speaking softly but punching above its weight, Robyn O'Neil's small drawings — in watercolor, colored pencil, and graphite — are nearly hiding in plain sight behind a pillar. Titled "Los Angeles, 4 O'Clock" and steeped in a frozen sense of time and place, the paired images are loosely rendered and tinged with spontaneous odes to land and cloudscapes. Clouds, in rippling rhythmic layers, are the primary thing in her subtle graphite on canvas piece "Nocturne."

One could say that rippling rhythms — with foreboding overtones — also describe the one photograph in the show, Sherry's epic, purple-hazed "Muley Point II, Bears Ears National Monument, Utah." The stunning aerial overview of the rugged landscape both dazzles the senses and triggers pangs of angst, knowing about the decimation of the vast national monument's acreage under then-president Trump's pernicious anti-environmental reign. Thankfully, order and acreage were restored by President Biden. Future status: unknown.





*'2pm In the Park' – Soumya Natrable | Credit: Josef Woodard*

Rougher stuff is also afoot, including Indian-born, Chicago-based artist Soumya Netrable's gruffly charming painting "2 p.m. in the Park." A raw, color-infused view of a couple in an overgrown and unpopulated park is far from Renoir's impressionistic park-based canvassing, with a folk-art-like and post-neo-expressionist sense of play. The shambling looseness of the style and pictorial content contrast the notion of a park's controlled and ordered slice of nature.

In its own expressive corner is the eye-grabbing sight of Gabriela Ruiz's "Drip," a vibrant multimedia wild ride with a materials list including "insulating foam on the artist's old IKEA desk top." Warm pink-to-red tones dominate the composition, broken up with a slash of yellow and patch of blue, but the main "event" takes place in the seemingly implosive bubbling mass consuming the right side of the frame, like a diseased ectoplasmic unraveling functioning as a metaphor for Mother Nature's destruction in training.

Or are our paranoid senses about the state of the natural world taking art appreciation too far? One can hope. A more innocent reading finds that "Drip" is a vivid exercise in the match-making of painting and sculptural art object. Let's go with that.





*'Drip' – Gabriela Ruiz | Credit: Josef Woodard*

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***New Landscapes Part II*** is on view at SBCC Atkinson Gallery (721 Cliff Dr., Humanities Bldg., Rm. 202) through February 28. Gallery hours are Mon.-Thu., 11 a.m.-5 p.m.; Fri., 11 a.m.-3 p.m.; and by appointment. See [gallery.sbcc.edu](http://gallery.sbcc.edu).