

Two of an Imperfect Pair

NEW SBCC ART DEPARTMENT FACULTY MEMBERS STEPHANIE WASHBURN AND ARMANDO RAMOS COME TOGETHER IN THE TWO-PERSON SHOW AND MAKE FOR SURPRISINGLY COMPATIBLE GALLERY MATES

By Josef Woodard,
News-Press Correspondent



'Office of Loss Control,' Armando Ramos and Stephanie Washburn
When: through April 7 (closed March 25-April 2)
Where: Atkinson Gallery,
 Santa Barbara City College, 721 Cliff Dr.
Hours: 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Monday, Tuesday and
 Friday; 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday
Information: 965-0581, ext. 3484;
 gallery.sbcc.edu

In past years, Santa Barbara City College's Atkinson Gallery has offered a valuable forum for faculty artists to show their work, in different settings. Larger group shows have been innately diverse overviews of artist-teachers in the building, while one-person shows have offered more concentrated public windows on the art — and aesthetic — of new faculty members.

It's at least a slightly different story with the current Atkinson show, "Office of Loss Control." Although ostensibly and officially an exhibition introducing two new Art Department faculty members, Armando Ramos and Stephanie Washburn, the half-unexpected interplay and complementary qualities of these artists conspire towards one of those accidental wonders of a show.

In this spare but effective exhibition installation, with curator (and Atkinson Gallery director) Sarah Cunningham and the artists, the strategically placed, often pop culture-spiced but enigmatic sculptures by Mr. Ramos and the mixed-media (photography, video, drawing, performance touches, combo-style antics) resonate together. They seem to be, if not soulmates, then gallery mates with just enough commonality and individuality to get along beautifully in this defined art space. As disparate as these young artists may be, in medium, ends and means, they share a certain affinity for dream states, skewed irony and out-and-out humor, and inquiries into what it means to be awake in 2017.

We know we're in for something somewhere left of conventional upon entering the gallery, and finding three black Santa Claus effigies gracing the far

wall, in the form of the piece called "The Congregation." Welcome to Mr. Ramos' world, where a perforated, internally illuminated, and sad sack variation on Casper the friendly ghost ("Corner Man") stands nearby a piece in the middle of the gallery floor, "LBC," whose utilitarian materials (a bent metal pole, an ungainly hunk of concrete) are transfigured by the gilded coating of gold leaf.

In a corner of the gallery, his piece "Portrait of Puissance" re-channels and redials art historical classicism and religious art/cherubic references, with a quartet of white porcelain figures that have been broken, unbound, and bound in red string. Reverence dances with its opposite, irreverence, but in a way still respectful of lingering art traditions, with a wink at the Church.

Mr. Ramos, whose resume has included studies in the Midwest and a recent stint in North Dakota, has settled into SBCC, with a kind of witty sculptural approach reminiscent of the long-standing but recently SBCC teacher Ed Inks.

Ms. Washburn, who earned her MFA at UCSB, has been showing her work in various sites around town, including group shows at College of Creative Studies and in last year's MCASB show at Hotel Indigo, "Shift, Stretch, Expand: Everyday Transformations."

The main body of work in this show stems from her fascinating, liminal and somewhat disturbing yet somehow delightful series with the cryptic title "Congratulations, You've Made a Wonderful Decision." To create these works, she aims her camera downward into a space with a video screen as backdrop, staging various disorienting situations, mostly with her own hands and select props, between the layers of perceiver and refractor. These dreamy scenes, often punctuated with small "action moments" or even mildly incendiary outbursts and crackling mid-air micro-explosions, feel right and real, and yet logical comprehension remains just out of reach.

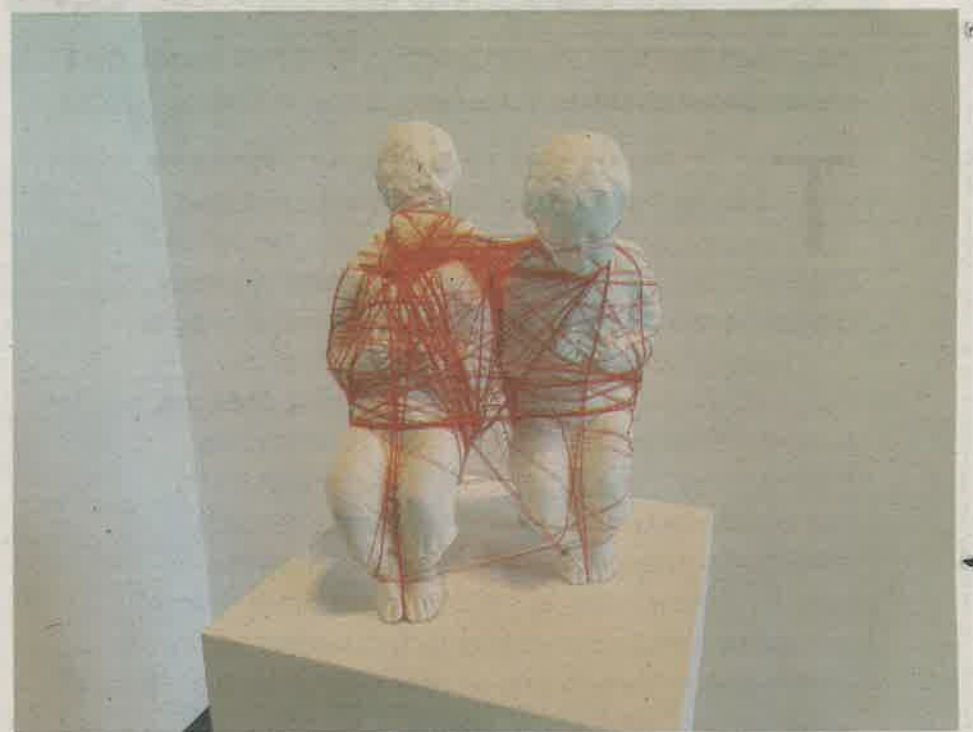
What happens between those layers doesn't stay in any rational scenario. Social interactions seem to be afoot, as in the image of what appears to be a heated discussion between a woman — seen from the back of her head — and man in mid-tirade, in eclipse. But, in fact, it's a portrait of the artist in a non-encounter with a video apparition.

Her deadpan minimalist charm factor so embedded in these pieces goes kinetic



Courtesy photos

Stephanie Washburn, "Congratulations, You've Made a Wonderful Decision 1"



Armando Ramos, "Portrait of Puissance"

(in a very slow way) in the video piece "Idaho," which initially appears like an exercise in meditatively static stimulus. Spoiler alert: stick around for at least four minutes, and you may catch sight of a flying potato. Across the room, her large charcoal drawing "Portrait" is definitively nebulous, as in the life-of-clouds sensibility, and, if anything, a portrait of

periphery — and the periphery of human clarity.

Different as they may be, the artists get along in a subversively beautiful way, using dry humor and personalized means to artistic ends not easily explained away, but oddly hypnotic. At the risk of massaging a cliché can you say "dream-like?"