



"Primordial Waltz"



"Bovine Malaise"



"Missing Rib"

Photos courtesy Atkinson Gallery

## Between things known

SANTA BARBARA-BASED ARTIST MARIA RENDÓN IMPRESSES WITH HER ONE-PERSON SHOW 'MISSING RIB,' DELICATELY BALANCING ANIMAL AND ABSTRACT GESTURES, AND OTHER ARTFULLY ILLUSIVE TACTICS

By Josef Woodard, News-Press Correspondent



### "Missing Rib: Maria Rendón"

**When:** Through March 27

**Where:** Atkinson Gallery,  
Santa Barbara City College,  
721 Cliff Dr.

**Hours:** 10 a.m.-7 p.m. Monday-Thursday,  
10 a.m.-4 p.m. Friday-Saturday

**Information:** 965-0581 ext. 3484, gallery.sbccc.edu

It is fair to say that artist Maria Rendón tends to work in a gray zone, thematically, but with a palette that is anything but gray. Her alluringly gauzy acrylic on paper pieces blend strange colorful forms — life forms, optical forms, dream visions — that can seem amorphous and diaphanous, which seem to convey or refer to things both real and otherwise, at the cellular and metaphorical levels. These shapes ooze and float on top of stronger, more anchoring backgrounds, like ghosts on a grid or the ephemeral nature of life itself, against the deceptively orderly backdrop of human institutions and societal boxes.

The artist tells stories, without explaining the context or offering plot arcs, and she paints pictures about the world we live in, without name-checking or owning up to it, all to intriguing artistic ends. A larger sense of a story appears to be underway in Ms. Rendón's wonderful current show, "Missing Rib," at Santa Barbara City College's Atkinson Gallery, in which we get a larger, more interconnected idea of how her various and evolving artworks — seen around the area, at Westmont, the Contemporary Arts Forum (now Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara) and last year's UCSB MFA show — compound their expressive power in a smartly grouped setting. As a sign of her dual artistic personality,

her fine artist entity resides, cyber-wise, at mariarendon.net, while her commercial and "straighter" artistic life lives over at mariarendon.com.

In keeping with the ambiguous and open-ended meaning of her individual pieces, the show's narrative is a non-linear one. The back wall of the gallery hosts "Accidental Virtue," an unframed and epic, daisy-chained procession of the primordial or cellular, blob-like forms that act as protagonists in her more rectangular-constrained, conventional paintings in the show. We've seen their formal kin elsewhere in the show, in the egg-meets-vaginal imagery of her small quartet of "Untitled" works or the wriggling, post-Georgia O'Keeffe-ish forms of "Missing Rib."

It is as if, in her epic wall piece, these forms have busted free of their restraints, and are writ large, loose and free. From the opposite end of the scale and spectacle perspective, she has plastered the gallery's column with countless wee paintings-on-Post-It notes, some of which will fall during the course of the show, like autumnal leaves from a tree.

In some sense, the Santa Barbara-based



"Dust to Dust"

**RENDON**

Continued on Page 45





Photo courtesy Atkinson Gallery

**"Modern Humans Emerge"**

## RENDÓN

*Continued from Page 43*

Ms. Rendón's own life and present trajectory as a fine artist is a case of busting out of a former mode, and the Atkinson show serves as a signifier of that transformation. A successful illustrator and commercial artist, whose clients have included American Airlines and Capitol Records, Ms. Rendón has recently ventured deep to refine and explore her fine artist persona, delving into a strikingly personal aesthetic, working the between-zone of the animal and the abstract, the material and the illusory.

Her work presents a delicate and never-fixed balance freedom and control. Sometimes, we get a hint of Francis Bacon's spectral magic, with pictorial strategies that can be hard and mystifyingly soft at the same time. In "Modern Humans Emerge" (its very title tips us to her underlying interest in primordial memory), vaguely humanoid forms are seen in melting or apparitional mode, set against — hovering over — a gently order-imposing horizontal grid.

In another painting, translucent jellyfish-like shapes drift across the picture plane, with shapes evoking continents (is that Africa, or just a pictorial coincidence?), tickling our senses and contextual bearings. Similarly, "Bovine Malaise" is more ostensibly representational than any of the other works in the room, with a bovine-ish figure baying at the moon and a fence-esque grid behind it. And yet the decorative surface handling of said bovine and a certain dream logic ambience to the picture makes it appear to be neither here nor there, while also being both of those things. The mind reels, but not too arduously, or to the point of anything more than a pleasantly dizzy dislodging of preconceived ideas about what art should look or behave like.

"Reading" the show from left to right, we wander slowly past the massive, eye-friendly wash of "Accidental Virtue," then past the found sculptural fragment of "Dust to Dust," with an actual tree limb in the material mix, and land at the soft-spoken finale of "Primordial Waltz." A small, unassuming painting, quieter than its colleagues, it appears as a twilight vision, with a ghost of an animal spirit rising — or dancing, in the musky elegant darkness. Like other pieces in the show, this one touches on some plane of reality or knowing just beneath, beside or in the ancient memory of the one we know. The gray zone has spoken.