

New year, new exhibit: Atkinson Gallery celebrates human figures

Alloy Zarate, Staff Writer

In the Atkinson Gallery's first exhibition of the year, part one of "Eleven Figures in Two Parts" features five Southern California-based artists who specialize in incorporating the human body in their work.

The highlight of the exhibit is "Sunbather," a piece by Los Angeles-based artist Gerald Davis. This abstract oil painting portrays a feminine figure laying down and looking towards the sun.

Because of the painting's size, walking up to it feels like being swallowed up into another dimension.

Walk even closer and you'll find yourself completely mesmerized by the small bright dots of color and texture on the canvas.

It's as if you yourselves merge with the canvas.

On the opposite wall of "Sunbather" lies a set of five vibrant acrylic paintings by Brian Calvin, an Ojai-based artist.

All of his work in the gallery depict close-ups of human faces.

The stand-out piece of the set is "Split Composition," which features a slender, bright pink finger being held up to a gap-toothed mouth, framed by yellow hair, keeping the observers' eyes in the center of the canvas.

The paintings were intentionally placed to mimic a sentence with the furthest right painting, "Shared Layer," being the punctuation.

It is an abstract, two-faced illusion that attacks the eyes with mismatched patterns and sizes.

"The set has a relationship to language," said John Connelly, the director of the Atkinson Gallery.

And while Calvin's "Shared Layer" contributes to the theme of the set as a whole, it would have been better left out of the gallery.

The exhibit also features a sculpture titled "God Bless Preston" by Ojai-based artist Karon Davis. It is made out of plaster strips, chicken wire, steel armature, glass eyes and a stop sign.

The piece captures the motion of a person reaching for a stop sign while sinking into the ground.

Davis created this piece as an homage to those suffering from the devastating effects of climate change.

This sculpture sticks out from the other works in the gallery, both literally and figuratively.

It's a refreshing contrast to the other works in the gallery.



Jesus Villafranco Perez

Brian Calvin pieces displayed in the Atkinson Gallery on Monday, Jan. 27, 2020, in the Humanities Building at City College in Santa Barbara, Calif.

Photographer Xaviera Simmons has 2 prints in the gallery. The first, “Index Four, Composition Five,” is quite confusing.

At first glance, the incorporation of a human figure is easily missed.

Upon closer inspection, the focal point of the photograph is a human body, wrapped up in cloth, magazines and other assorted items, blending in with the background.

Juxtaposing this very subtle photograph is Simmons’ second photograph in the gallery “Sundown (Number Nineteen).”

It features a person wearing a Piet Mondrian-Esque dress holding up cardboard binoculars and a photograph of children playing in a lake.

Simmons’ work aims to explore the African American experience. Connelly said the title of the photograph “refers to towns where African Americans weren’t supposed to be out after dark,” a form of segregation.

However, this message is lost in “Sundown” due to the excessive amount of patterns.

An untitled photograph of a person swimming in a body of crisp-looking water taken by Santa Barbara-based photographer, Manjari Sharma, is the most simple in the gallery.

But it’s simplicity makes it tranquil.

There aren’t any gimmicks or deeper meanings. It is simply beautiful for capturing a moment of peaceful motion.

Connelly said that “artist have a lot to say” and by viewing this exhibit, we may uncover new ways to interact with the world around us.

Part 1 of “Eleven Figures in Two Parts” will be on display until February 14th. Part 2 will open on February 21st.