

Between a Bone and an Abstract Place

OPENING THE NEW ACADEMIC YEAR AT SBCC'S ATKINSON GALLERY, DEBORAH ZLOTSKY'S DRAWING EXHIBITION, 'LIFELIKE,' LIVES UP TO ITS TITLE

By Josef Woodard, News-Press Correspondent



Deborah Zlotzky, 'LifeLike'

When: through September 27

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

Hours: 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday and Saturday

Information: 965-0581, Ext. 3484, gallery.sbcc.edu



'Vorlorn'



'Jinniest'

School is in up at Santa Barbara City College and with that comes the welcoming news of another season of art exhibitions at the Atkinson Gallery. Although still in its utilitarian, but quite functional temporary space – while the actual, highly scenic gallery is under construction – the Atkinson remains an important stop on the Santa Barbara art map. Much of the credit for its success belongs to the inspired and still-new, second-year directorship of Sarah Cunningham.

Starting off the season with a strong and beguilingly strange show, the gallery hosts Providence-based artist Deborah Zlotzky's deceptively light and breezy-on-the-eyes drawings, going by the poetically and literally apt exhibition handle, "LifeLike." Using powdered graphite and occasionally oil, Ms. Zlotzky has developed a fascinating mode of imagery with vague references to the "life" stuff of anatomy, joints, skeletal and tissue-like visual materials, but also operates in some mysterious between-zone, at once vivid and vague.

Her titles, likewise, tend to be wonderfully loopy and "language like," but descriptive of some alternate fantasy world, time and space continuum. She works in and creates a world where words such as "Enfatch," "Manklewee," "Primblurter," "Smool" and "Greeper" feel right, regardless of what they may ultimately mean.

While the drawings seem to usher our senses into interior worlds where surgery, x-ray visions and skeletal remains dwell, the work could just as well be cosmic or metaphysical, and our natural urge to make sense of what we're observing is at once frustrated and both expanded and exploded. That desire for clarity impulse, and the restoring thereof, seems to be part of the point of her perception-stretching, aesthetic approach.

Not incidentally, there is also the pure pleasure of admiring her unconventional mastery of draughtspersonship. Ms. Zlotzky, who begins teaching at Rhode Island School of Design this year, is notably deft at using shading, suggestive space and texture to convey forces and vapors as much as matters of matter, or fixity of content. She depicts energies and abstractions, as well as things, and we try to connect the contextual dots between those elements.

So with "Slyde," for example, we analyze a pile of visual data and get pictures of entrails, gauzy lengths of fabric, or some ambiguous internal organ. "Smool" is a puffy, cumulus-like accretion of stuff, out of which we detect – like tipsy picnickers playing the cloud-shape picture game – the form of a long face and a small bunch of grapes.

Cohesive as the gathering of drawings is as a set of variations on her designated personal theme, each is also different. With "Greeper," a hint of a mangled knee joint or a skeletal detail haltingly announces itself, while "Bicusper" comes across as a negative from a dental x-ray, but without specific evidence to validate that impression. It may also be an investigation into some rampart of inner space or-dimension of the artist's concocting.

"Lumvarum" is a vertical piece differentiated from the surrounding artworks by its dizzy, inwardly spiraling design, a tubular visual sensation which feels somehow intestinal, but also feeds off of its inherent quality of abstraction. And what is that strange beastly impression conveyed in "Manklewee," as if a half-dematerializing illustration of some mutant, alien variation of a hippo-like animal? Especially in this case, the title itself has added impact: "Manklewee" has an onomatopoeic link to the faux creature in question.

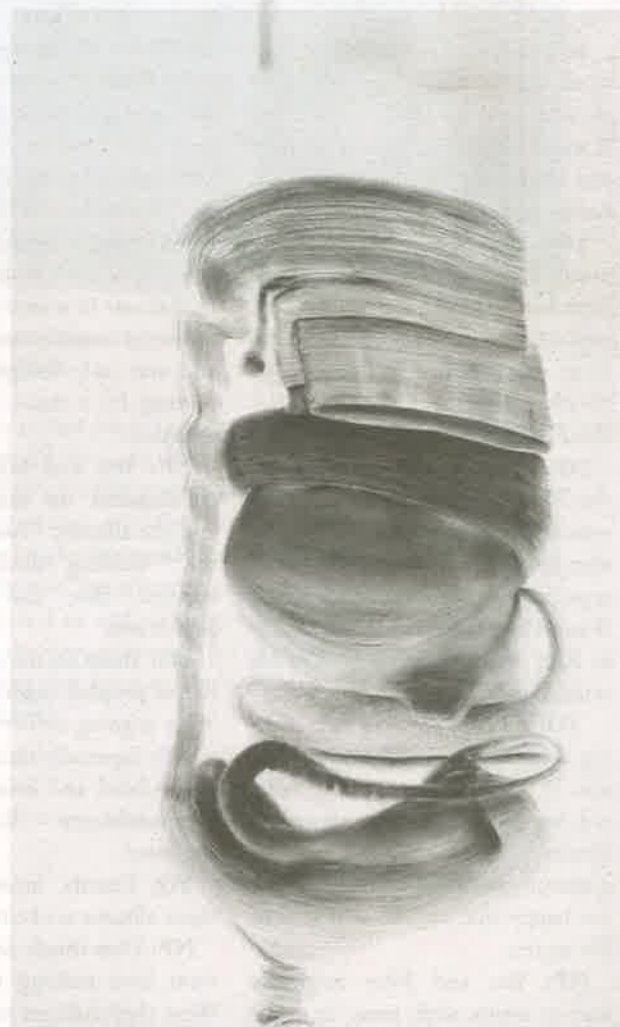
Context counts for much in this show as we drift from one figment of the artist's imagination to the next. In one of the show's larger pieces, "Vorlorn" (one letter and one emotional degree away from "forlorn"), we get the impression of an abstracted, alien skull. But that reflexive interpretation is thrown into a more poetic relief by the proximity to its neighboring piece on the wall, "Jinniest." Here, the windswept, twister-like energy form, and energy forces prevail over any distinct worldly connotation.

Sometimes, a cigar is not just a cigar; a pipe is not just a pipe; and a cloud of smoke is more than just pretty vapor.



Atkinson Gallery photos

'Manklewee'



'Slyde'