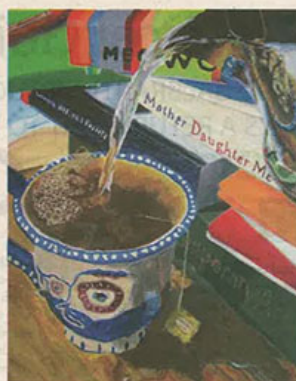


'Beached,' Marcos Christoudoulou



'Fly Away,' Siri Soedahl



'Spilling Over,' Kathi Scarminach

Atkinson Gallery photos

An array of artistic voices hovering around one center

SANTA BARBARA CITY COLLEGE STUDENT ART SHOW DELIVERS ITS USUAL HEALTHY DIVERSITY OF STYLES AND VOICES

By Josef Woodard, News-Press Correspondent



Annual SBCC Student Exhibition

When: through May 16

Where: Atkinson Gallery, Santa Barbara City College, 721 Cliff Drive

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.sbccc.edu



'Matryoshka,' Seon Kim

When encountering a necessarily dense and diverse group art exhibition, such as the current Santa Barbara City College student art show, a general — though not binding — rule of thumb in art appreciation is that the eye sweeps the general to find a specific, striking point of focus. It may be something large, audacious, anchoring or otherwise eye-grabbing, but it becomes an entry point or prism through which to circulate through the varied whole of an experience.

In this year's annual SBCC show, the first back in the old, renovated Atkinson Gallery after its interim gallery housing last year, the eye (mine, at least) latched onto a particular bounty of denim dangling from the ceiling. It comes in the weirdly alluring form of Jose Solis' "Bound to Denim," a large pupa-like construction made from the all-American stuff of Levi's blue jeans, suspended from the ceiling and suggesting an odd merger of archetypal fashion/identity and the materialistic branding of American values.

Further adventures and insights into the contemporary consciousness, including the smartphone and post-digital age, filter through the show, nicely and cohesively juried by UCSB Art, Design & Architecture curator Elyse Gonzalez. But there are plenty of moves into more timeless and traditional art-making pursuits here, as in the healthy selection of conventional ceramic and sculptural works and still life studies.

Meanwhile, a small companion show is in place over in Atkinson's "Annex Gallery," presently on the walls of the John Dunn Dining Room, with the show "Alchemy of Light & Space," curated by Atkinson gallery intern Lia de Wit. The art here, tethered to the concept of visions of light and space (both architectural and cosmic) are addressed variously.

Seon Kim's "Matryoshka" is a graphic illustration of broken mirror visions of a mask-face visually echoing into the void, while Siri Soedahl's color photograph "Fly Away" is a sensuous image of a red-haired woman amidst airborne

diaphanous fabrics, involved in mysterious wind-chilling factors.

Marcos Christoudoulou's "Beached" takes his surreal in-lings into the painting realm, with an urban dreamscape and a creepy green monolith, possibly indicating life during wartime of the post-nuclear kind. Ben Eckert's "20140331" states its clever, miniaturist art-about-art case in a tiny gallery-like relief piece, with loud and gaudy pink and green walls and twisty, tubular entrails acting as a wee artwork in the wee gallery within a gallery.

In fact, Mr. Eckert's saga continues in the main student art show up in the Atkinson Gallery, with several more of these Lilliputian gallery sculptures set on a wall by the door to the outdoor patio and sculpture garden. There, on the patio (with a killer view of the harbor, it should be said), a full-scale plastic tubing fixture sculpture toys with our perceptions of scale and context, compared to the scaled-down relief boxes.

If a teasing use of unexpected material and scale tricks are at work in Mr. Eckert's micro-macro pieces, similar manipulations can be found recurring throughout this year's crop of art, cohering into something of a sub-theme.

Materials, often of the "found" and left-of-normal-art-supplies variety, bend and reinvent themselves in new ways, as certainly seen in Mr. Solis' aforementioned denim-ic sculpture and in another immediate eye-grabber in this show, Isaac Hernandez's "Immortal." Here, a huge and slightly sinister older man's face peers down on us as if in judgment or chastisement, like some Orwellian renegade deity, made of the "immortal" stuff of Styrofoam "peanuts."

Norman Krohn's "Chain Links" cleverly fools the eye into believing that the metal chain links are the real thing, not crafty ceramic substitutes, while Mindy Cheng's materially onomatopoeic "Rice Teapot" is just that, a little teapot, short and stout and made from rice. Kaitlin Planté's "Reinventing the Wheel" is a half-whimsical wheel of knowledge, as presented by a spiraling wheel of World Books, that pre-Wiki-

pedia source of info and insight, now handy as art supplies.

Among other inventive variations on sculptural practice is Charles Starr's "Lost in Space," a sleek and whimsical linkage of three color-coded striped backgrounds, host to mini-bowling ball-like orbs, which then host tiny astronauts. Space is the place, and the kitschy lift-off point.

In the painting department, artists here assert strongly individual paths of expression. Again making a link between the modest Annex gallery show and the sprawling main event, painter Mr. Christoudoulou's "Sweet Downhill" follows a painterly strategy similar to his could-be Apocalyptic "Beached" painting, with sharply detailed features contrasting woefully abstract sections. In this case, though, the subject is vastly sweeter, with delectably rendered confectionary decadence melting into goosy abstract swatches, as if representing a state of post-desert indulgence.

On a more serious note, and a timely one, in the walk of the rightful Oscar anointment given the film "12 Years a Slave," Stanley Holder presents the large and unflinching lament and indictment of American slavery, "Chained to Cotton." The stylized image deploys mainly painting but also subtle archival photographs as moments of haunting truth about a scourge on the nation's conscience and history.

A distinctive tincture of psychédelic cartoony vision comes through in Journey Coward's metal print street scene "Faceless." Coming from a different pop culture place, Sumo Ueda's "A Mario Moment" innocently channels wistful memories of old computer/video gaming, and the world of "Super Mario," through a view of a virtual room with hyper-pixelated square and edges and incidental Mayan moments in the conjuring. In another Ueda piece, "Looking through Me," the pixels get palpable as they zoom out into 3-D protrusions, morphing painting into sculpture and back.

From a similar yet separate angle, Jean-Dwight Ledbetter's self-evidently named "101 North Bound" is a landscape/freeway-side painting in which the flat surface is intruded upon by a strange rectangular inset, like an off-ramp to some parallel reality off the 101 we know and (sometimes) love. For something rather completely different, Mr. Ledbetter's

ceramic bust, "Surreal Selfie," is a comically ghoulish alter selfie ego, running counter to the ideal of making ourselves look good for the social media "outside" world.

From the impressive sampling of entries on the age-old still life genre, we find Karl Blasius' "Enchantment," a darkly luminous painting of gourds, all curving contours and autumnal glow, and Yi (Sam) Xuen Zhang's fine pencil and chalk "Still Life," its study of vessels and vegetables made delicately lyrical and hinting at transparency.

Kathi Scarminach's "Spilling Over" is a thematically-loaded still life variation, where the visual narrative features an image of tea being poured into a nearly full cup amidst books conspicuously alluding to art, feminist theory, mother-daughter relations, and other notions on the verge of spilling over into each other.

And on the wall, just left of the denim cocoon in the smorgasbord of artworks in the gallery, check out Byron Blanco's rather deceptively quiet and calm, and ultimately hypnotic woodcut piece "The Factory Pattern." Here, the ambiguous meld of vague nods to anatomy, machinery, and eyeball-suffused mysticism patternizes our senses into happy submission, in an odd post-Op Art meets Freemason iconography meets Grateful Dead light-show way.

Suffice to say, this year's harvest of SBCC student art teases and pleases in many ways and to different degrees. Somehow, a more discernible center is holding this time around. The muchness and multiplicity of the show's fare can still be a bit dizzying, as in years past, but things tend to flow smoother this time around. No doubt, the inviting ambience of the "new Atkinson" gallery's rebirthing return also doesn't hurt matters.

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'Chain Links' Norman Krohn

Atkinson Gallery photo