

Thickening Plotline Imagery

NEW SBCC ART DEPARTMENT FACULTY MEMBER CHRISTOPHER ULIVO SHOWS HIS SURREAL NARRATIVE PAINTINGS IN A STRANGE AND LIVELY EXHIBITION

By Josef Woodard, News-Press Correspondent



Christopher Ulivo, 'Jeepers Creepers!'

When: through Feb. 22

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

Hours: 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Mon.-Thurs., 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Fri.-Sat.

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



'Mummies Return: Sherwood Ball'

Christopher Ulivo photos



'The Tibetans Have Finally Showed Up'



'Fondue Ghost Cat Massacre, Waltham, Mass.!'

Something lively and strange is going on lately in the Santa Barbara City College Art Department. Striking solo exhibitions by two new faculty members this academic year in the school's Atkinson Gallery, Brian Scott Campbell's "I've Got Levitation" last fall and the current show, Christopher Ulivo, "Jeepers Creepers!," up the ante of narrative imagination, while conveying highly personalized style-content equations.

With a cryptic flair belying its retro mock-cheery title, Mr. Ulivo's new show buzzes with a peculiar and sometimes dark charm. Working in the unusual and generally antiquated medium of egg tempera on panel, he conjures up fantastical scenes, tinged by a surreal surrealism, odd pop cultural and hybrid historical references, lined with dream logic and gonzo comic bookish moxie.

Mr. Ulivo's exploration of the gnarly corners of the imagination and a folk art-like simplicity can remind us of a folk art icon like Henry Darger or an eccentric such as James Ensor, but with a more broadly allusive and artworldly vocabulary of oddity and familiarity. We recognize certain features of the tangled "storylines" in his pictures, mixed in with elements of unaccountable mystery, as in "Mummies Return: St. Espy" finds a lumbering mummy approaching a church and spooked figures in a seaside scene.

Teasing bits of data we know and possibly love keep sneaking into the narrative mix, but in jarring, jostled contexts. "Elder Sputnik Visited by Ghosts of Christmas" is a quirky, quixotic mash-up of WWF wrestling, Dickensian figures, the Wise Men and a splash of Sputnik kitsch. Why not? In the zanily whimsical "Away Team Interrupts Relations," "Star Trek's" Starship Enterprise members have beamed down into a scene, rudely interrupting a carnal encounter in motion, on some obscure planet.

At times, the titles themselves collude with the images to create a dizzy magical atmosphere. One of the more striking pieces here, "Spy Posing as Geisha Murdering General Lee in a Brothel 1862!" quite accurately describes the goings-on in the lucid dream-like scene, but the title itself also reads like a Richard Brautigan poem.

Seemingly mild-mannered interior spaces give rise to darkish doings in his work, as in "Lars Hansen Mid-



'The Elders Plot To Destroy The Marvelous Unity Of Black And White Egypt'

night Sun Ghost Cat Murder Mystery!," in an apparent series which also includes "Fondue Ghost Cat Massacre, Waltham, Mass.!" The exclamatory and specific titles for violent fantasies only adds to the riddles of the material.

We're not so able to shrug off the picture as fantastical in another domestic interior "Private Eye Uncovers Double Suicide" is less easily shrugged off as fantasy fancy. The violent deed is already done, and an eerie calm hovers over a room with two inert bodies fitted snugly into the compositional scheme.

Also included in the show are a set of rough sketch drawings, suggesting the early stages of his creative process, and also a set of "Star Trek" shadow puppets, including Spock with a rotating penis attachment.

Through the mystery theater aesthetic of "Jeepers Creepers!," Mr. Ulivo comes across as a storyteller in paint, but one whose stories refuse to go down a linear narrative path, opting instead for more irrational byways of the imagination.

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