



Photos courtesy Atkinson Gallery

A video still from Canadian artist Jillian McDonald's tri-screen film "Valley of the Deer," where an obsession with the horror film genre meets art, showing at SBCC's Atkinson Gallery.

Art in the headlights

CANADIAN ARTIST JILLIAN MCDONALD'S TRIPLE-SCREEN FILM-BASED PIECE FEEDS FROM HER INTEREST IN THE HORROR FILM GENRE, PUT TO HYPNOTIC, ARCHETYPAL ENDS

By Josef Woodard,
News-Press Correspondent



"Valley of the Deer: Jillian McDonald"

When: through February 20

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

Gallery hours: 10 a.m.-7 p.m. Monday-Thursday,
10 a.m.-4 p.m. Friday-Saturday

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



Prior to filming "Valley of the Deer" in Dufftown, Scotland, Ms. McDonald sketched small drawings, left, and then sketched them on on a wall, right, to see how it would look in full size.



Something hypnotic, creepy, artful and laterally cinematic has made its way into the Atkinson Gallery, in the form of Canadian artist Jillian McDonald's mesmerizing "Valley of the Deer." With a sense of timing neatly in synch with the launch of the current Santa Barbara International Film Festival, the artist has dealt with aspects of the horror film genre, as archetypal and psychological reference point and springboard.

Even so, the Santa Barbara City College

gallery's presentation is about more than just film, although her slow, sometimes almost static wall-width three-screen piece is the centerpiece that pulls us inexorably into its sensory world. Drawings on paper, of figures and creatures from film hang on the side walls, while larger-than-life figures painted directly on the wall opposite the screening lends a site-specific element, which seems to slyly impose itself on the open, semi-darkened gallery space.

Other peripheral adornments to the film itself include a series of "augmented reality"

sites around the gallery, on campus and off-campus, accessible through a special app, LAYAR, which invites an interactive engagement beyond the gallery space.

But firstly, and primarily, there is the film itself. Tapping into another cinema-related truism, location counts for much in "Valley of the Deer," shot in the lush, soggy and unspoiled landscape outside Dufftown, Scotland, where the artist was granted a nine-month artist-in-residence stint at the Glenfiddich Distillery in the area. There, she patiently assembled a series of gorgeous

and coolly elegant tableau-style shots, into which ambiguous animal-masked figures cryptically appear, and occasionally teeter or are subjected to the time-altering business of jittery fast-motion or dreamtime ultra-slow-mo.

Graced with an eerily ambient, avidly non-specific musical score, the film stirs up a sense of foreboding and anxiety, and the non-linear nature of the fragmented scenes can conjure up a certain disquiet possibly greater, or different, than a clichéd horror film storyboard. At the same time, the links to horror genre aspects, and our sense of impending shock factor, is offset by a certain structural detachment — its three-screen approach suggests both the ancient art historical convention of the triptych with modern-day info/image overload.

Ms. McDonald's looping piece runs about 20 minutes, and is well worth the time and consciousness investment, with a climactic, ritualistic payoff, then segueing back into the gentler stuff of rainbows and greener-than-green spaces. The artist's piece does clearly belong in a gallery, as it takes key detours away from the logic and language of film, as such, and embodies the expanded dimensions of the project image.

And yet there is enough of a crossover that diehard, film-wearied SBIFF-goers may well want to take a break from the theater and head up the hill to this amazing, view-endowed gallery space, and experience art that may trigger echoes of certain directors, from the Russian Sergei Parajanov to the German Hans-Jürgen Syberberg to America horror flick king Wes Craven. All the while, a dreamy elegance helps guide the work into unsuspecting mental crevices.



Patrons take in artist Jillian McDonald's "Valley of the Deer" at SBCC's Atkinson Gallery.

Photo courtesy Atkinson Gallery