



New Atkinson exhibit showcases varied views of ‘What is America?’



[August Lawrence](#)

An Atkinson visitor admires Zoe Leonard’s piece “Horseshoe Falls from Goat Island” on Thursday, Feb. 25 at City College in Santa Barbara, Calif. The piece is made up of 210 different post cards with images taken from the same location over a span of time.

[Yarrow Hogan](#), Staff Writer

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The Atkinson Gallery showcased “What is America?” — an exhibit which illustrates the challenges and conflicts of American cultural identity.

Featuring a curated collection of pieces from Felix Gonzales-Torres, Zoe Leonard, and Glenn Ligon. Consisting of one piece per artist, each illustrates its own version of American identity through its individual artistic perspective.

Connelly incorporates three works to form one parallel exhibit. “Each piece is up to interpretation,” Atkinson Gallery Director John Connelly said. “I create a dialogue between artists around the theme of American identity.”

Connelly presented the opening reception on Thursday, Feb. 24

Much like any version of art, there is room for curiosity and analysis. The gallery was alluring, drawing a steady stream of guests, each taking time to examine the pieces.

Upon entry to the gallery, you are greeted by a ceiling-to-floor electrical illumination of 24 scattered bulbs attached to a long network of cords which are laid out strategically in the center of the space. “Untitled” (Silver) by Felix Gonzales-Torres is an expression of individuality and materialism.

“Horseshoe Falls from Goat Island” by Zoe Leonard shows a visual depiction of our borders. Between the United States and Canada, Niagara Falls stands as an iconic landmark between the bordering countries. Leonard collected 210 postcards each picturing the same scene of the falls and organized them geometrically on top of a blank wall. Each postcard was slightly different while still showing the same view. Some of the cards were inscribed with text and some were faded film, each a snapshot of history.

Gallery attendee and immigrant Manjari Sharma said that she was struck by the theme of edges and borders which correspond with the “lines we draw around ourselves that define who we are.”

The third piece, “Figure #43,” is an acrylic canvas painting by Glenn Ligon. The canvas was completed with shiny gold paint and figures of black coal dust creating contrast and texture. The theme of America resonates throughout the majority of Ligon’s work, which has a deeper meaning beyond first glance. Using excerpts from the famous essay “Stranger in the Village” by James Baldwin, Ligon used subtle techniques to embed words and phrases from the essay within his painting. Ligon was inspired by Baldwin’s experience as an African American activist and writer in the United States and used that as motivation for his work.

“What is America?” is a unique gallery that is worth a visit.

Guests are required to complete a wellness check to obtain a wristband and wear face coverings while at the exhibit. For more information visit the [gallery website](#).

Located on City College’s East Campus in the Humanities building, The Atkinson Gallery will be presenting “What is America?” until Apr. 1 and is available for viewing Monday through

Thursday from 11 a.m. -5 p.m. and Friday from 1 p.m. – 3 p.m.

Art Show

Atkinson Art Gallery

John Connolly

Santa Barbara City College

SBCC

What Is America

