Subdividing the Things We Know

MIAMI-BASED ARTIST SIOBHAN MCBRIDE’S ATKINSON GALLERY SHOW, ‘EVERY NIGHT IS A PIZZA DINNER,’ WORKS THE GRAY ZONE BETWEEN THE REAL AND THE SURREAL

By Josef Woodard, News-Pres Correspondent

Siobhan McBride, ‘Every Night is a Pizza Dinner’
Where: through December 6
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: 965-0561, ext. 3484, gallery@sbc.edu

J ust as the exhibition title almost whets the appetite with comfort-food promises, while turning left into absurdity. Siobhan McBride’s show, “Every Night is a Pizza Dinner,” now at Santa Barbara City College’s Atkinson Gallery, stakes its considerable claim of appeal on the age-old, surrealistic premise of tarrying with our sense of what’s what in the world. In the Miami-based artist’s skewed view of the world, as told in a series of deceptively smallish, gouache-on-panel paintings, the proximity and the ultimate disconnect with reality as we know it is what energizes both the art and our responses to it.

To put it in another way, hers is a new surrealism based on the slicing and dicing—or the pizza cutter dividing—of fragments of realistic scenery, both seducing and frustrating our empathetic interpretations. The world is a disjointed place in her art, and, of course, outside her art, which circles back to certain recognition of the underlying reality and truth possibly contained in her mild-mannered, wild-side gallery of pictures.

We come close to understanding the rational reality of a given painting, but are thrown off the scent with varying strategies on the artist’s part. There are always riddles and cavaans to be sorted out, although no easy answers are forthcoming, and the voids of logic end up being their own reward for the beholder.

In “Cold Storage,” a reasonably and pleasantly painted mountain landscape scene sits in the top half of the composition above a homespun, Natural History Museum-like bunkie, while below are diorama-style tables and presumably stuffed animals in an unexplained basement. Meanwhile, “Arctic” stacks the referential deck differently. An empty attic in the bottom half of the painting licks beneath an idyllic, landscape-with-waterfall image above, and begs the question: is the landscape a view of the setting of the house with said attic? Is it a large painting stuck up in the attic? Or is it an unrelated pairing of images? Your guess is valid.

“Grid” poses another brand of a subversive, pictorial “wow” factor. A bland river scene with a perkaboo-oval snatch of landscape hovering overhead in the dark gray clouds teems into the realm of dreamy, goonzo graphics, with the whimsically nonsensical appearance of multiple dog heads and one human face, floating like random hallucinatory visions. They also serve as strange “grid” points in the compositional structure of the piece.

Titles do matter, in various ways in Ms. McBride’s peculiar little paintings. “Pair” refers to the pair of holiday gloves—or are they fascists, oven mitts?—that function as the centering bit of consensus reality in an otherwise ambiguous, crackedup

'Cold Storage'

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