The Big Scale Down
LONG-RUNNING ANNUAL 'SMALL IMAGES' SHOW IS GATHERED INTO THE NEW TEMPORARY ATKINSON GALLERY SPACE AT CITY COLLEGE

or many years, the prized local tradition of the annual "Small Images" exhibition at Santa Barbara City College has been an occasion when visitors could be found squinting and getting up close and personal with art which is, by nature and curatorial mandate, minute. Viewers have also traditionally had to deal with the innate distraction of the stunning harbor and city view from the Atkinson Gallery.

But now that the gallery space is being renovated for a possible two-year period, the temporarily enclosed ad hoc Atkinson gallery on the West end of campus strangely punts the show in a different light. Oddly enough, we've drawn more deeply into the art here, and poised to apply more concentrated attention to the art in the room. And there is much to admire and apply concentration to with this year's crop of wee art.

As usual, the variety of approaches and ideas in the "Small Images" show attest to the naturally flexible business of thinking and art-making on a deliberately small scale. One of the finest examples in the gallery, possibly deserving this observer's "Best of Show" vote, appears via Julia Ford'sscore drawings. Graced with the subtitles "See No Evil!" and "Hear No Evil," these pieces are drawn with a rather startling delicacy and shy anthropomorphizing gestures.

Paintings come from assorted angles, such as the volatility-infused gum of Phoebe Brunner's "Pink Fog," with its beauteous yet foreboding dusty pinkish plumerearing its head over a tilled field. A post-Pop arty buzz can be detected in Frank Krifka's "Eye Candy," a crisper still life study of a lollipop against a somber sea green background, while Zacarias Paul and Saul Grey-Hildebrand's "Study of Line Under Dubious Circumstances" is an abraded, palpable post-painting creation. Its material list includes acrylic, glue, and burnt paint on panel.

Connie Connolly shows a pair of small, dim-lit portraits, "Facing 60 - Mike," and "Facing 60 - Shelley," a subtle tip of the art-making process toward the theme of graceful aging.

Wit and whimsy bubbles up in some of the three-dimensional art here, as in Cody Lynch's untitled "found object" creation, with shiny and precious-looking railroad stakes on delicate cheesecloth-like fabric. Nicholas Coronesos "The Conversion" consists of eyepieces, one attached ear and, true to the "small" condition here, a tiny figure climbing a ladder, as if to whisper advice or corrective influence into the ear.

For Colleen M. Kelly's "Prickly Puttering Pod," the goofy allusive title actually neatly conveys the slightly loony, slightly ominous spine of the mutant art-object. Virginia McCracken, an inventive master of the miniature vignette, has often graced this exhibition with her work, as happens again this time around, with "Philosophy Department," its creatures nestled in isolated cubicles.

Some of the more interesting pieces in the show, in fact, lean to the left of conventional media or established artistic means. For instance, "Grape," "Ginkgo," and "Blackberry," Nicole McKeel's realistic studies of leaves against plain, grained and unvarnished wood panel cleverly cross-reference notions of nature, as representation and material. Patricia Tierney's effectively collaged piece called "Iowa" manages to evoke the culture and persons of its title, with its cartoned-edged view of a Middle American farm.

Art for modernity's sake arrives via Saraha Marsden's "iPad Drawing #495," quite an enchanting and even organic-feeling layered abstraction, especially considering that it was created on a tool based on ones and zeroes. To keep in the spirit of "Small Images," though, shouldn't it have been created on an iPhone? Just wondering.

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