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ART REVIEW: Variety as Spice and Creative Grease

'Juxtaposition' brings together a group of well-known local artists

By Joseph Woodard, News-Press Correspondent

August 4, 2017 6:20 AM

'Juxtaposition'

When: through August 31

Where: Santa Barbara Tennis Club, 2375 Foothill Rd.

Gallery hours: 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily

Information: 682-4722, 2ndfridaysart.com

Art-watchers in town have come to realize, in recent years, that one intriguing and continuous source of art exhibition can be found in the unlikely locale where tennis players, swimmers and clubbish congregants generally hang and gather. Head up to Mission Canyon and into the hallway ad hoc "gallery" in the hallways of the Santa Barbara Tennis Club, and find there a rotating series of art shows, usually in month-long segments, and generally linked to a given theme.

Deviating slightly from the regular plant, the current fare in the SBTC series, known as "2nd Fridays Art @ SBTC" for its show-opening date, is a summery two-month show casting light on a six-artist group of well-known local artists that includes Susan Tibbles, the inspired assemblagist and collagist also responsible for putting these shows together and bravely "keeping the lights on" in the series. She is joined by Dug Uyesaka, Theresa Carter, R. Anthony (Tony) Askew, Michael Irwin

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Susan Tibbles, "Untitled (Revolution)"

Courtesy photos

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and Holli Harmon, each artist leaning into personal winds of expression and style, for diversity's sake. The show is "Juxtaposition," and it's a happy one.

Ms. Tibbles gets a proper showing in this grouping, venturing into her bodies of two- and three-dimensional work, with a cohesive persona yet also exploratory creative spirit intact. Juxtaposition, in fact, is a key factor within her art, as a whole and as regards a single piece.

Humor and an easy, wash-and-wear subversive quality, along with a sharp visual sense, tend to guide and mark her art. Here, the Tibbles assortment includes the delightful absurdity of the "Felinity Deity" series of altered images, in which religious figures and art historical iconography by the likes of Van Dyke are coyly fused with feline elements, with emanating cosmic clouds suggesting divine intervention, catbox dust storms, or both.

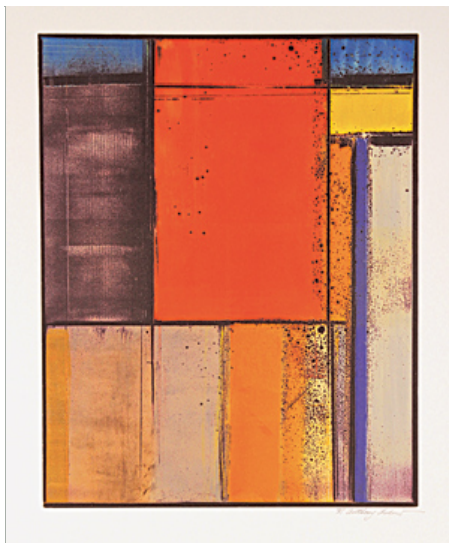
"Cheeky Monkey" is an assemblage with her customary seamless blending of disparate objects seeking a new internal logic, here with a giddy simian incorporated into a wooden lamp structure, with a bent-wire heart shape imposing a sentimental sheen to the whole, unholy affair. A stronger whiff of a governing theme goes into "Untitled (Revolution)," mixed media construction graced by foggy and fragmented references to the American Revolution, as if alluding to fuzzy and/or revisionist collective memories of Founding Father ideals.

The prize for largest and loudest piece in the room goes to Michael Irwin, whose work in large sculpture and sometimes deceptively garish paintings can amp up the sensory factor in his art. "Stripper" is a painting with a shimmery surface and sensuous palette. Though essentially abstract painting, it contains teasing (key word) suggestions of a flordid shower curtain, in some exotic, surreptitious locale. The degree to which a viewer takes up that suggestion, rather than let it live in the realm of the cerebral, may say as much about the beholder as the beheld.

By contrast, the exhibit includes Mr. Irwin's alluring series of long, emphatically horizontal "beachscape" pieces, such as "Silver Strand." Polished, grain-loving wood bands stretch on the bottom of these works, with dreamy paintings of gently clouded skies above, and the two areas are thin separating lines of deep blue with tiny touches of breaking waves. With their literal and symbolic horizontality and the surfaces, finishes and textures involved, aside from the subject matter, these enticing pieces evoke a fresh variation on surfing art.

A different shade of summery art enters the exhibition picture courtesy of the summer/beach/R&R aura of Holli Harmon's small and evocative gouache on art boa images. Here images of people at leisure or of Santa Barbara harbor and wharf lights reflected on nocturnal water contain none of that post-Modernist, Eric Fischl-style air of critique, but instead embrace the innocence of the gesture, as if transforming family or "found" photographs into the stuff of hand-painted art.

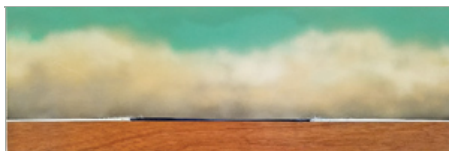
Theresa Carter has her own subtle and distinctively personal way with art. A certain folk art-inspired touch slips into her expressive vocabulary, as seen in pieces like "El Nopal" ? with cloistered burst of flowering color within a cactus ? or the semi-decorative bird imagery in "Apple Blossom" and "Together in Time," with hummingbirds adrift in a visual mix of clock gears and random foliage, the stuff of birder dreams.



R. Anthony Askew, "Steady Coolness"



Holli Harmon, "Don't Eat the Sand"



Michael Irwin, "Silver Strand"

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The in-house mission of juxtaposition takes a sharp left turn in terms of the work by longtime Santa Barbara artist Dug Uyesaka, subject of a memorable and well-deserved one-person show at the Westmont Museum in 2015. His three-dimensional assemblage impulses are left out of this occasion, instead focusing on a series of muted mixed media pieces such as "Looking East," with its swirl of abstracted energy and imagery ? something between a mutant fingerprint and a cyclonic outburst ? intersected by a rectilinear strip of paper. The wee, boxy insertion functions like a hint of order amidst the maelstrom.

A similar contrast of elements takes place in Tony Askew's "Steady Coolness" (a "Viscosity Monotype"). Here, the artist juggles and juxtaposes control and abandon, with its geometric puzzle gridwork of variously-colored rectangles lightly splattered with arbitrary drops and divided by raggedy lines, which lend organic instability to the fragile premise of orderly conduct.

There is much to admire and think about here, for those on the property for more than its intended use ? beyond the pool, courts and lounge chairs. Then again, "2nd Fridays Art @ SBTC" has been around long enough now that it, too, is an intended use.

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