Young Art on the Brinks

ON VIEW AT UCSB’S AD&A MUSEUM, THIS CROP OF EIGHT MFA STUDENTS, AGAIN ONCE DELIVERS, WITH ART AT ONCE INNOVATIVE, THOUGHTFUL, EDGY, AND SENSES-GRABBING.

By Josef Woodard, News-Pres Correspondent

"Temporary Clash: Graduate MFA show"
Where: Art, Design & Architecture Museum, UCSB
Hours: noon to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday
Information: 893-2953, www.museum.ucsb.edu

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y now, we've grown accustomed to the annual humble antics fest that is the UCSB MFA Thesis Exhibition. Can be something of a cerebral circus, along with its deeper messages and conceptual fistic. The practicalities of the annual events—often one of the most intriguing art events of the season in town, for various reasons—revolve around a public forum and transition moment for young artists moving beyond a certain, presumably into the professional, MFA in hand and on the go. Thanks to the energy and push of youth, mixed with the demands of creating and building a personal aesthetic in the University's MFA program, the show delivers on all the fanfare we expect of it. Here, the definition of MFA—Master of Fine Arts—might also be extended to include the qualifications of "innovator" (in a loaded way) and "original" artist.

Each artist is given a dedicated corner or area of the museum space in which to work, sometimes using that space to installation-minded ends. Mr. Nash's center, close to the entrance, relies on our attention through its inventive use of unexpected objects to unconventional ends. A bicycle has been transformed into an artistic object, with a fitted paint-splatter and human-made hole, ready to make its mark as illustrated in the video "Infinity Painting #2," showing the art in action.

He striking junk, sculpture "The Table," suggesting a micro-Mayan temple stowed in a nuclear reactor, is composed of colored electric extension cords, nestled on a stand and with a hint of dead beneath its gaudy color scheme.

Mr. Ignazi's work is given over to her large, lozenge and gently visualizing her collaging theme, from abstract forms to an entire wall—"wall collage"—sparingly splashed with drips and minimalism's charm. Letters and fragmented allusions creep into her art, whether the Hollywood sign in her dip: "La platafina rosa," or the doubly-insisted quote "ABOUT time," is "in." More primal associations, to shape, texture and object relations, are embedded in Mr. Moniz's canvas, referencing a more ancient past, sculpture called "Reminiscences." Combining natural structures, second-hand textiles (read plywood and repurposed Imperio and hoistery) and pine sculpture, the artist has assembled a personal sculpture garden which seems central to the vaguely archaeological. One can also find a certain Dr. Sausan's character in this goody, integrated community of art objects.

The museum's back gallery area is given over to a pair of absolutely different月s. Multimedia and program-oriented artist Echo Thomas's "Star Wars" is a sag, vacuous display, video/computer graphics, seemingly surreptitious government documents, a war room strategy board—blended into a jumbled convergence of info, covered (sadly) covered with implications of life in the post-w-WII, post-warframe.

Christopher Anthony Velasco's "Fresh Food" series harks a much simpler plan, at least on the surface. Altered and half destroyed Polaroids are then photographed and somehow convey an allegorical sense of medical calamity and disorders, through staged, unrealized and otherwise SNAFU-ed images.

To take us to the work and larger artistic take of Andrew Manton, proceed outside. On the right side of the museum's façade, beneath the placards reading "Art," "Design," and "Architecture" (the latter of the AD&A Museum acronym), the artist shows one of his murals. But it is a subdued model, with the most intense color and spatial density often marked, the mural itself. Mr. Manton, whose work incorporates mixed-media, video documentary, social activism and indigenous people's rights, makes an impact here through a relatively simple medium of scale and color. The murals visually play off a Native American ceremony, with a gray scale palette. Colored in an interpretative style, while maintaining a vibrant expressiveness. The mural's power is half-illuminated by the very understatement of its effect.

In another corner of the main gallery, we get a taste of the socially tuned-in sensibilities of Ms. Hvorslev, whose time as an MFA candidate included a run for the mayor of Santa Barbara. Her 6 x 6 foot mock "tiny house" sculpture here, "How to San Luis protest (Ms. Casta's Esu Casta's)" is a series of small, intricately detailed and unique sculpture, seemingly seamless, in its realization. The artist's vision is clear and up for auction for the low price of under $30,000. She took aim at the ubiquitous real estate market in Santa Barbara, while also questioning the worthy price of cultural histories in the arena, between Mexican, Spanish and imperialist forces.

Mr. Hvorslev also shows a large, busy painting, "Four Birds of Paradise," that skillfully evokes the visual effect of an eerie bloom and the perish of the condition objects, a broad use of color in these runs over the past year-and-a-half.

Spot fires, it so happens, also pop up as visual motifs in the fascination and "against type" fabric art of Kayla Marrs, whose centerpieces is called "Firewall," a term of multiple meanings. For itself is a character in the large, complex pivotal mesh of the piece, along with the implied issues of security in the word "firewall," soft-on-the-brick bristles, a goggle of little yellow foil (and harboring) emotions faces and references to modern questions both anguishing and trivial—such in the phrase "will Navajo sacrifices." Ms. Marrs puts the metaphorical pin in what is presumably the comfort coat of needlepoint, and other fabric crafty techniques. On another wall, she shows fabric signs, as in the present tally-crowd posters, containing samples of corporate Turner enterprises to flashback moments in the Tania era, from Stelitico, Tetcit and TKI brand products, the latter disavowing any connection to Charlestonville's sun-Nori TKI-gang. The sun's industrially plush surfaces do anything but soft-pedal the underlying message of social concern.

With this piece, and others in the museum, young artists are finding personal routes to expressing what means to be an artist in this historical moment, to be alive, alert, mind-up, and now with MFA in the back pocket.