

# Young Art on the Brinks

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

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## "Temporary Clash: Graduate MFA show"

**When:** through June 2  
**Where:** Art, Design & Architecture Museum, UCSB  
**Hours:** noon to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday  
**Information:** 893-2951, [www.museum.ucsb.edu](http://www.museum.ucsb.edu)

By now, we've grown accustomed to the annual humble art/idea fest that is the UCSB MFA Thesis Exhibition can be something of a cerebral circus, along with its deeper messages and conceptual fiber. The practicalities of the annual event—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 c.v.

Thanks to the energy and pluck of youth, mixed with the demands of creating and honing a personal aesthetic in the University's MFA pro-

gram (a more highly regarded program than in years past), the goods and ideas can be freshly provocative to outsider eyes. On first impression through deeper consideration of the show, this year's group—Maiza Hixson, Madeleine Eve Ignon, Adam Jahnke, Kayla Mattes, Elisa Ortega Montilla, Andrew Morrison, Echo Theohar and Christopher Anthony Velasco—serve up plenty of movement, color, texture, contexts gone wild and social awareness.

The show delivers on all the fronts we expect of it. Here, the definition of MFA—Master of Fine Arts—might also be extended to include the qualifications of "fun" (in a loaded way) and "fearless" art.

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. Jahnke's corner, close to the entrance, seizes our attention through its inventive use of unexpected objects to unconventional ends. A bicycle has been transformed into art-making object, with a fitted paint-dispenser and stenciled tires and ready to make its mark, as illustrated in the video "Infinity Painting #2," showing the art-bike in action.

His striking junk sculpture "The Table," suggesting a micro-Mayan temple married to a nuclear reactor, is comprised of colored electric exten-

sion cords, nestled on Astroturf and with a hum of dread beneath its gaudy color scheme.

Ms. Ignon's art nook is given over to her large, loose and jangly variation on the collaging theme, from discrete collages to an entire wall—"wall collage"—sparsely splashed with detritus and minimalist charm. Letters and fragmented allusions creep into her art, whether the Hollywood sign in her diptych "LA girlbrain room" or the doubly-intended phrase "ABOUT time," in "tm."

More primal associations, to shape, texture and object-relations, are embedded in Ms. Montilla's constellation (or menagerie) of sculptures, called "Remiendes." Combining metal structures, second-hand textiles (read retooled and repurposed lingerie and hosiery) and pine sculpture, the artist has assembled a personal sculpture garden which seems ritualistic and vaguely archeological. One can also find a certain Dr. Seuss-ian character in this goofy, integrated community of art objects.

The museum's back gallery is given over to a pair of distinctly different artists. Multi-media and programming-oriented artist Echo Theonar's "Stand 1" is a cagy, varied display. Video/computer graphics, seemingly surreptitious government documents, a war room strategy board — blended into a jumbled convergence of info, coated (and coded) with implications of life in the post-9/11, drone warfare-era.

Christopher Anthony Velasco's "Fresh Donor" series heeds a much simpler plan, at least on the surface. Altered and half destroyed Polaroid sources are then re-photographed and somehow convey an allegorical sense of medical calamity and disorder, through singed, melted and otherwise SNAFU-ed images.

To take in the work and larger artistic ethic of Andrew Morrison, proceed outside. On the right side of the museum's façade, beneath the placards reading "Art," "Design" and "Architecture" (the basis of the AD&A Museum acronym), the artist shows one of his murals. But it is a subdued model, without the extroverted intensity and pictorial density often marking the medium. Mr. Morrison, whose work incorporates mural-making, video documentary, social activism and indigenous people's rights, makes an impact here through relatively subtlety of means and scale. The museum mural ambiguously depicts a Native American ceremony, with a gray scale palette and in an impressionistic style, while maintaining a vibrant expressivity. The mural's power is half-harnessed by the its very understatement of its effect.



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In another corner of the main gallery, we get a taste of the socially tuned-in sensibilities of Ms. Hixson, 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 Losiento (Mi Casita Es Su Casita)," in varying states of finish and scrapiness, is ostensibly for sale and up for auction for the low price of under \$30,000. She takes aim at the exorbitant real estate/rental market in Santa Barbara, while also questioning the murky mix of cultural histories in the area, between Mexican, Spanish and imperialist forces.

Ms. Hixson also shows a loud, fiery painting, "Fire/birds of Paradise," slyly cross-stitching the visual charm of an exotic blossom and the peril of incendiary outbursts, a brand of angst in the news in these parts over the past year-and-a-half.

Spot fires, it so happens, also pop up as visual motifs in the fascinating and "against type" fabric art of Kayla Mattes, whose centerpiece is called "Firewall," a term of multiple meanings. Fire itself is a character in the

large, complex pictorial mesh of the piece, along with the implied issues of security in the word "firewall," soft-to-the-touch bricks, a gaggle of little yellow sad (and barfing) emoticon faces and references to modern questions both anguishing and trivial—such as the phrase "will Moviepass survive?"

Ms. Mattes puts the metaphorical pin pain in what is presumably the comfort craft of needlepoint, and other fabric crafty techniques. On another wall, she shows fabric signs, as if protest rally-ready posters, consisting simply of corporate Twitter responses to flashpoint moments in the Trump era, from Skittles, Tic-Tac and TIKI brand products, the latter disavowing any connection to Charlottesville's neo-Nazi TIKI-gang. The art's ironically plush surfaces do anything but soft-peddle the underlying message of social concern.

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

