

# ARTBURGERS IN PARADISE

## ART REVIEW

### 'EATING APPLES IN PARADISE'

**When:** through May 1  
**Where:** Contemporary Arts Forum, 653 Paseo Nuevo  
**Hours:** 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, noon to 5 p.m. Sunday  
**Information:** 966-5373, sbcaf.org



Lady E photos

'BLITZED,' JAMES VAN ARSDALE

Contemporary Arts Forum has invited an arty dozen to take aim at the coveted, mythologized and complicated city of Santa Barbara, with often fascinating results

BY JOSEF WOODARD  
 NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

Normally, when Santa Barbara artists take on the subject of Santa Barbara, the work is fit for a city commerce-approved booster campaign. It's another, though not entirely different story with the fascinating and at least slightly iconoclastic new Santa Barbara-themed exhibition at Contemporary Arts Forum. What makes the art here, by a strong arty dozen, so freshly alluring are the questions and probing tactics used in turning the focus on our coveted, mythologized and complicated American city.

We know something fresh and possibly provocative is afoot by the loaded Biblical-tinged title "Eating Apples in Paradise," triggering specters of potential Eden-banishing doom. But hey, apples might just be apples, as well, a beckoning and tasty fruit in whatever locale.

Another insight to the thematic

flavor of the show comes through a telling quote by the late French theorist Jean Baudrillard, strategically situated at the entrance to the show: "Santa Barbara is a paradise. Disneyland is a paradise; the U.S. is a paradise. Paradise is just paradise. Mournful, monotonous and superficial though it may be, it is paradise. There is no other." Thankfully, the art here isn't all that glum and languid, but rather embraces angles on the reality and archetype of Santa Barbara, from questioning and also celebratory vantages.

Another brand of the "tree of knowledge" is placed in the gallery's center, in the form of a palm tree made from recycled T-shirts, in Elizabeth Folk's "Our Miraculous Progeny." The tree casts shadows on a video, blending rippling pool water and hands engaged in various tasks, indicating work and play in our coveted town.

More water and beachside allusions filter throughout the exhibi-

tion, naturally, but from less than typical art sources (i.e. seascapes and beachscapes are not in the picture here). MacDuff Everton — fresh off the release of a fine and luminous photo essay book on Santa Barbara, with text by his wife, Mary Heebner — shows his cool yet dramatic panoramic views of Hendry's Beach, Chase Palm Park and the Wilcox Property at dusk, allowing us to appreciate anew the beauty in our midst.

Photographer Cyndee Howard, meanwhile, aims at the glinting, quixotic visual effects of water. And Hank Pitcher, a longtime Santa Barbara artist who has painted some of the finer beach-minded paintings we've seen, is neatly suited to this show's agenda. He cleverly shows two of his recent paintings of the renovated, posh Coral Casino (in-



'OUR MIRACULOUS PROGENY,' ELIZABETH FOLK

CAF APPLES

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'WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO AFTER THE ORGY?,' SAUL GRAY-HILDENBRAND

## CAF APPLES

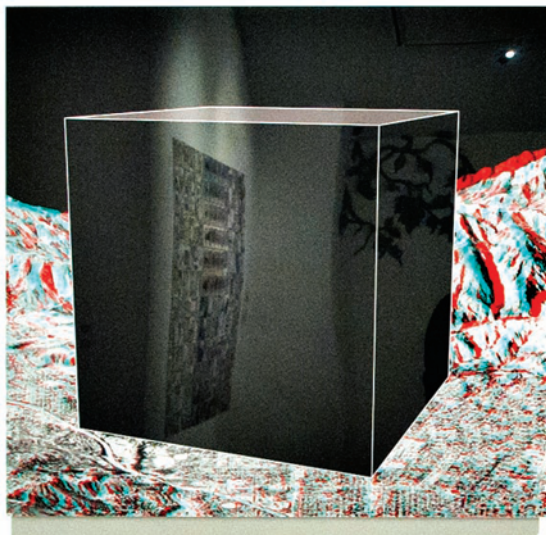
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cluding one with its tower looking iconic and detached against the azure sky. For historical perspective, these paintings flank a small 1910 painting by Lockwood de Forest of the same site, but spacious and pre-country clubbed.

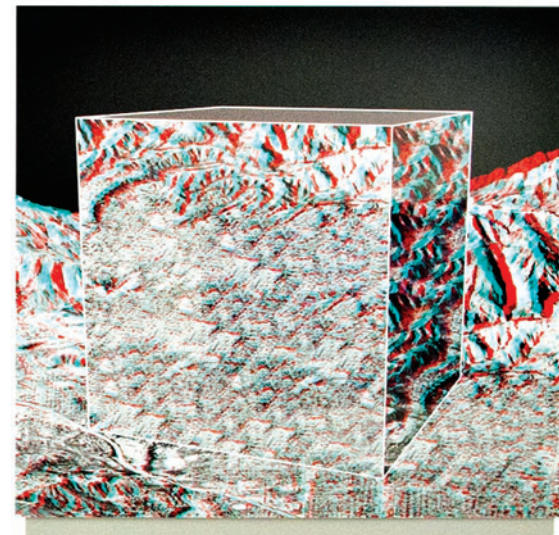
Nature is once or twice removed in the recent botanical art of Penelope Gottlieb, both psychedelic and rational, and elegantly "defacing" Audubon prints, with a cause. (Gottlieb presently also has an art show at Lotusland, speaking of psychedelic local natural outposts).

Across the gallery, and coming from a disparate perspective, Nancy Gifford's "The Devil is in the Details" inventively details the localized experience of the artist, a recent émigré to Santa Barbara. Her mosaic-like myriad of images and objects amount to a composite atmospheric statement of impressions, from murky drawings to collected, boxed stones, all getting at the ever-elusive sense of a place and one's interaction with it (regardless of how long one has lived in a place).

Nestled in a small gallery, a room of its own, is James van Arsdale's "Blitzed," a gonzo installation that cheekily stewes on a range of local references, done up in a dark



'COMES TO TOWN,' WARREN SCHULTHEIS



cartoon fashion. He blends woozy LSD-like light show effects, Santa Barbara's 1969 infamous oil spill, the burning of the Isla Vista Bank of "Amerika" and a general vortex of motifs in motion, against a deceptively calm silhouetted skyline.

In other sculptural/assemblage/installation work, Kimberly Hahn's "Bloodlines" is a lovely yet alienating work. She deftly relies on simple means and colors — red ribbons suggesting both celebration and blood-letting, a white scrim and a black chalkboard-like background with chalk marks like dance steps or a crude body outline.

From the droller humor department comes Saul Gray-Hildebrand's tableau, posing the artistic question, suitable in a town where some degree of affluent hedonism lurks, "What are We Going to Do After the Orgy." A life-size, death-like figure of a man is surrounded by flowers, to mordant comedic effect. The piece seems to address, if obliquely, the dark underpinnings of a mythically paradisiacal locale such as ours.

Logging an expressive kinship to Jeff Koons' mock-bland mundanity, Steven Soria's "Western Pleasure" is a dry-witted, decadent and not exactly pure and simple saddle, equipped with Louis Vitton and holsters for wine stops along the trail. Some viewers might gaze

upon this art and indulge the thought "I'd like to buy this for my horse," not "my house."

More conceptual and decidedly optical aesthetics are at work in other art, in this nicely varied gathering. Jonny Troyna's "First Generation Constellation" is a slow-mo black and white video art piece, with faces morphing and shifting, projecting a fluid sense of identity and bearing in the world.

And it is civic identity itself at the heart of Warren Schultheis' "Comes to Town," and with 3-D glasses, no less, for this 3-D-obsessed era. His diptych views Santa Barbara from on high, in a bird's eye (or satellite's eye view) form, but with somewhat jarring monolithic cubes obscuring the scenery — one an ominous black void and the other filled with visual data of our fair city, and mountains.

Even if it's not the most seductive piece in the room, those dueling identities and polarities in Schultheis' work may, in the end, come close to summing up the strange, investigative and elastic composite portrait of Santa Barbara presently roosting at CAF. It's a civic fun-house mirror effect, with more than just fun on the brain.



'BLOODLINES,' KIMBERLY HAHN



'WESTERN PLEASURE,' STEVEN SORIA