

Art bazaar, with things delightful, bizarre and affordable in the mix

IN ITS SEVENTH ANNUAL EDITION, THE CHRISTMAS-TIMED '100 GRAND' EXHIBITION AT SULLIVAN GOSS OFFERS 100 SMALL-ISH ARTWORKS BY NOTEWORTHY ARTISTS AT A NICE PRICE

By Josef Woodard, News-Press Correspondent



"100 Grand"

When: Through Jan. 31

Where: Sullivan Goss, 7 E. Anapamu St.

Hours: 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily

Information: 730-1460, sullivangoss.com

To the gradually expanding list of cultural traditions defining Christmastime in Santa Barbara, we must fully acknowledge "100 Grand," if it hasn't already had its place secured on the official list.

Now in its seventh year and looking healthy and splendid, "100 Grand" is the pithily, cryptically and accurately named annual exhibition at Sullivan Goss that offers art-hungry (and neophyte art-buying) Santa Barbarans a crack at 100 artworks priced under \$1,000.

If that sounds like a crafty commercialization ploy, think again. The show has, alongside its "nice price" marketing logic, become a haven and a go-to showcase for mostly Santa Barbara-based artists of merit, skill and exploratory ideas, ready to bring their full attentions and aesthetic game to the challenging forum of small scale works.

As Sullivan Goss curator Susan Bush mentioned on a recent afternoon in the gallery, she has seen the quality of work in these shows elevate dramatically, from casual small studio castoffs in the early days to art rising to the challenge of — and being created specifically for — this respected annual showcase.

Certainly the fruits are generally more splendid with this year's crop. Or maybe it just feels that way, faced with the rich bounty carefully but densely dispersed in the front gallery space.

Familiar artists, who have shown in various capacities in the gallery, make their way into the blend, including Hank Pitcher,

Nicole Strasburg, John Nava, Sarah Vedder and assured — and assuredly playful — assemblage artists Dan Levin, Dug Uyesaka and Virginia McCracken (whose rodent-ized library piece, "Dutch," conveys a sure but slightly creepy holiday cheer).

In the interests of keeping some focus and avoiding the blur of excessive names in a single review, I have opted to stick to using this review to spotlight 12 artworks — 12 being a handy amount, in the Christmastime numerology of things. Here, then, are a dozen of the 100 pieces, which caught my eye on one mid-December afternoon spent perusing notable small things in the gallery.

Diversity is the name of the game here, but somehow exhibitional music is made from the fragments. Along musical lines, "Atonality" is one of gallery regular Angela Perko's tasty and fresh post-Cubist paintings. Her cheery-hued formal entanglements — a meshing of lines, color bursts and jabs — hint at the artistic equivalent of some mutant mash-up of Modernist composers Anton Webern and Erik Satie.

Nancy Gifford's "Conjuring Clouds" is a Hockney-esque mosaic/pileup of wee cloud photos, bulging outward in a wave-like protrusion in one area, and busting out into three-dimensionality, as if impacted by a sudden energy gust.

Nearby on the same wall, Tracey Sylvester Harris's "Evening

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at the Shore" has a look and graphic charm reminiscent of R. Kenton Nelson's reworked retro femme fatale paintings, this one depicting a svelte swim-suited pinup-style woman from the lips down, perched, in concertedly triangulated form, on the tip of a boat. Formality and tasteful sensuality meet, and get along.

Abstraction has more of a stake in the game this year. One appealing example is Julie Montgomery's "Moonrise," one of her muted, soft-edged and patternized abstraction paintings, which hints at a squinting, glistening transformation of what might have been a seascape in another life.

Another merging of abstract and natural elements, Svetlana Meritt's archival digital print "Flow" loosely alludes to tree bark, color-wheel vertigo and texture-as-content.

Colin Fraser Gray works his own special niche of the abstract domain, with one of his pen-and-ink pieces lined in cartoony dread, with gushing oily pinwheels spewing from a perforated white vessel. The interpretation game is open here: I see sinister forces — ecological? Political? Apocalyptic? — bursting forth from a status quo, and also just a visual play of solids versus fluids.

Meanwhile, across the room, the eye (well, this eye) is beckoned by Scott Anderson's coyly clever, slyly witty and impressively painted farm animal portraits — the pig Annabelle and the cow Earl, beaming out of their small, porthole-like round formats.

Cows have something of a field day, in fact, in

this "100 Grand." Mark Lozano's fittingly grayish painting "Cow Building Restoration" is a combination ode to and lament for the locally legendary building at the corner of Milpas and Canon Perdido. The former dairy has had its proud cow sentinel on the roof painted myriad times by high school students. It deserves historic landmark status, or at very least a sensitive painting such as Mr. Lozano's.

And cows, as innate landscape painting elements/protagonists, appear in the hazy distance, amidst the Eucalyptus trees in Meredith Brooks Abbott's elegant "Pasture."

Very different, and invitingly hard-to-categorize painterly sensibilities, can be found in the show as well. Abigail Zimmerman's droll "Stop Lights and Views" is a melancholic but somehow duskily comic painting of a nondescript and trivial (and thus profound) stretch of road, with most of the composition given over to a murky gray sky.

Valdori Fussell's "Jar of Peaches," a luminously painted still life, celebrates the contents of its vessel, but some among us — gazing innocently from across the room but pulled in for a closer look — also see a natural corollary to body parts or animal life in fluid.

And what to make of Maria Rendon's "Pupa?" This small, beguiling painting gets curiuser and curiuser upon closer and prolonged scrutiny. The heroic subject is an odd amorphous, translucent-skinned life form afloat in a pale blue-and-pink void or adrift in fluid, one of its points of ambiguity. The effect is strangely both real, if on some microscopic and unseen level, and sensuously surreal, and a real steal at less than a grand.

Merry Christmas and to all a grand (or less) night.



"Pasture," Meredith Brooks Abbott

Photo: courtesy Sullivan Goss

CLASSIC DOONESBURY (1985)



PARDON MY PLANET

