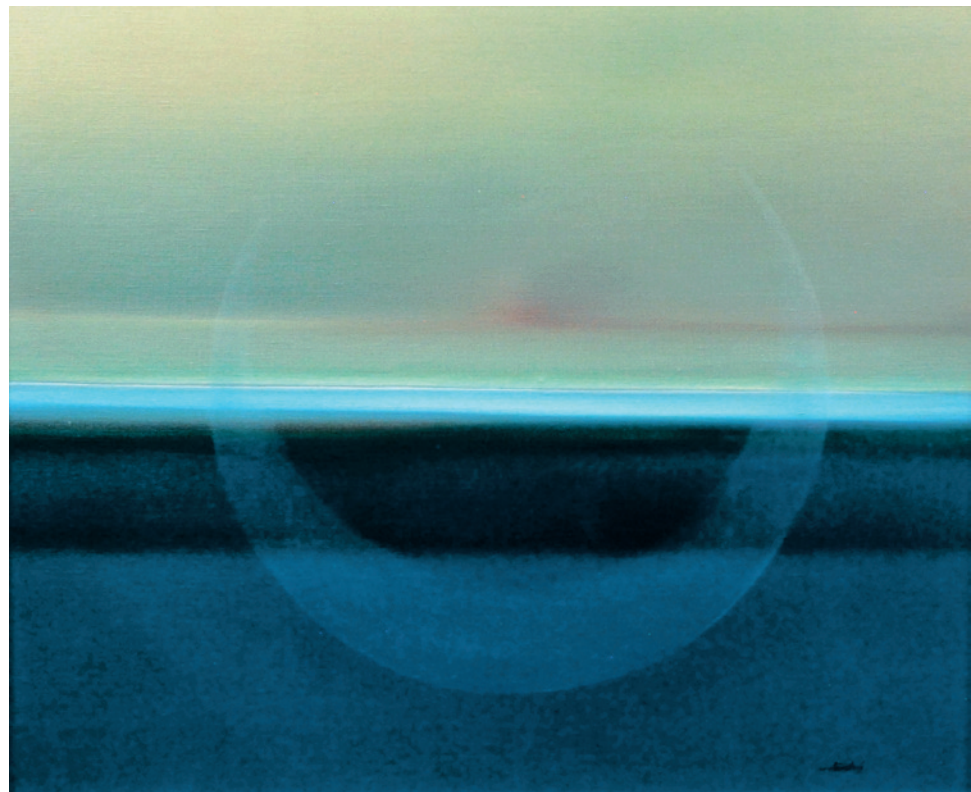




'Female Nude,' Joseph Knowles

Sullivan Goss photo



'Untitled II,' James Armstrong

Sullivan Goss photo

Art School Incidentals

'SANTA BARBARA OLD SCHOOL' CELEBRATES THE SANTA BARBARA ART INSTITUTE, 1967 TO 1974

By *Josef Woodard*,
News-Press Correspondent



'Santa Barbara Old School'

When: through March 30

Where: Sullivan Goss, 7 E. Anapamu St.

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

Information: 730-1460, sullivangoss.com

Exhibitions such as Sullivan Goss' current "Santa Barbara Old School," quite apart from the art entailed and hung, can serve as healthy, historical wake-up calls, disabusing the illusions we may have that the symbiotic relationship of Santa Barbara and artists — and art studies — are something new. Five years ago, a similar show at the Santa Barbara Historical Museum, "Guiding Lights," selectively chronicled the even older art school in town, the Santa Barbara School of Fine Arts, circa 1920 to 1934, which evolved into the Sullivan Goss-showcased campus, Santa Barbara Art Institute, in operation from 1967 to 1974.

As hinted at by the iconic arch-based logo for the Sullivan Goss show, the school was based on the arch-endowed Riviera compound, which also housed the precursor to UCSB and Brooks Institute, located near the Riviera Theater. Aptly and gamely named, "Santa Barbara Old School" gives us a slice of the life of the Art Institute, via a showing of paintings by the school's five main founders, and an actual carved and painted wood sign from the old campus.

Also in the gallery, for local and extra-art color, is a smattering of data — including a News-Press article marking an institutional birth announcement — culled from a huge body of archival material collected by co-founder Jim Armstrong, who died in January, shortly before this show opened. Mr. Armstrong's passing marked a last-living link to the Art Institute.

Said archives were officially presented to the Santa Barbara Historical Museum last night as part of "1st Thursday," continuing this piece of Santa Barbara's art-institutional history into the future. Local art history is hallowed in Sullivan Goss' main gallery, not only by celebrating an important yet still little-known academic enterprise in town — one that graduated more than 400 bachelor's degree students during its time — but also by duly noting the lives, backgrounds and artistic product of its founding artist-teachers.

Joseph Knowles, for instance, came from his native Montana to Santa Barbara to study at the Santa Barbara School of Art, and later taught at Cate and Crane schools, and at the Art Institute.



Armstrong Archive of the SB Art Institute photo

Inside the Santa Barbara Art Institute, date unknown

Mr. Knowles made a dent in the public interface through his epic, mosaic mural, which now adorns the vast, new structure going up at Victoria and Chapala streets.

His sole painting in this showing is "Female Nude," fashioned with a facet-tweaking, rustic, Cubist style (recognizable, in fact, in another Santa Barbara painter of old, Channing Peake). The painting is fairly distinct from most of the art in the show, al-



'Coastal Inlet,' Ray Strong

though there are some valid comparisons to be made to the paintings of Mr. Armstrong, particularly a fuzzy-edged, grid-like composition that vaguely suggests urban architecture (underscore "suggests").

By contrast, a series of untitled paintings split the difference between abstraction and the general vicinity of seascape art, in which oceanic fluidity and the calming equilibrium of blue hues and horizontal horizon lines are complicated by subtle abstractionist and texturalist strategies. A seascape is not just a seascape in evocative, mildly subversive ways.

For his historical part, Mr. Armstrong served for nearly 20 years as curator of the DaSilva Gallery, which showed work of some Art Institute-connected artists, including Douglass Parshall (1899-1990). Mr. Parshall, son of famed artist DeWitt Parshall and a popular local artist for decades, studied in Paris, New York City and Santa Barbara — at the older School of Art, with Frank Morley Fletcher. The two Parshall paintings heed different stylistic muses, indicating his morphing artistic voice: the gnarled, more expressionistic painting, "Dead Pine Trees" is

scratchy to the visual touch, while the faint and hazy "Bicycle Race #2" floats by the senses almost unnoticed, dream-like.

Another Art Institute founder, with an entirely different approach and set of interests in art, was John Gorham, who studied at UC Berkeley with the acclaimed Japanese artist Chirua Obata, who exerted a strong influence on Mr. Gorham's work. We see the Obata imprint evident in such high-contrast and line-defined Gorham paintings as the stark, shape-sifting, mountainscape image "Morning Twilight," and also in the jagged-edged, black-and-white invention "Disintegration, Sierra Series, West Cloud," a deconstructed and palette-stripped landscape puzzle.

Landscape in the truest and most proudly traditional sense was the domain and lifelong passion of the famed Ray Strong (1905-2006), who painted past the 100-year mark. He came to Santa Barbara to paint dioramas in the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History — dioramas still comfortingly in place there. Mr. Strong was also a pivotal founding force for The Oak Group, an ongoing collection of accomplished and eco-minded



'Bicycle Race #2,' Douglass Parshall

Sullivan Goss photos



'Disintegration, Sierra Series, West Cloud Meets East,' John Gorham

landscape painters. (In fact, you can see their latest group show this month, across the street from Sullivan Goss, in the library's Faulkner Gallery).

"Santa Barbara Old School" devotes one wall to a nicely diverse spread of Mr. Strong's paintings. The range includes his large, blue-hued and sinuous image "Coastal Inlet," and the compact 1960 painting "Golden Hills,"

the visual imprint of which lives up to the verb and noun, and essential being of its title.

In short, despite the relative modesty of the exhibition, there are humble revelations and history aplenty on these hallowed walls. The gallery has also announced the history lessons will continue, as this is the first of a new series dubbed, "Art History (805)."

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