

# A Numbers Game, Five Years On

SULLIVAN GOSS' ANNUAL HOLIDAY-TIMED '100 GRAND' SHOW CELEBRATES ITS FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

By Josef Woodard, News-Press Correspondent



## '100 Grand'

When: through Feb. 2

Where: Sullivan Goss, 7 E. Anapamu St.

Hours: 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. seven days a week

Information: 730-1460, sullivanagoss.com



'Interstate 10, California,' Mary-Austin Klein

It started out innocently and resourcefully enough, five years back, in the midst of the breathtaking economic downturn, which required gallerists and arts people everywhere to resort to creative thinking around the problem of a rapidly shrunken art market. Sullivan Goss' curator, Jeremy Tessmer, thought it might be a good idea to present a show of a hundredfold small works at small prices — as in a grand or less — by artists both known around the Santa Barbara scene and otherwise.

Now in its fifth year, and now curated by the gallery's Susan Bush, the show cleverly and logically called "100 Grand" is up and running, and rewarding a smart art shopper's investment-minded investigation, or just a casual look-see. The art in question includes some of the gallery's most popular artists, including John Nava, Hank Pitcher, Nicole Strasburg and Angela Perko, as well as new names and artistic personas. It's a varied, holiday-timed mix, with surprise nuggets of goodness along the way.

Among the well-known Santa Barbara artists who have contributed to the show is Phoebe Brunner, well known for her larger and slightly surreal variations on the landscape painting genre, as though she's a plein air painter on an alternate universe version of planet earth. It's interesting to see her work in small scale, which invites a different, quasi-miniaturist brand of observation.

In the figurative painting corner of this year's selection, the work refuses to play things straight. Joann Dufau's "We'll Always Have Parts" is a darkly cheeky image of clothes-less dolls with a rose and cigarette in hands, which really do appear "naked." Holli Harmon specializes in realism revisited, as seen in her quirky painting, "Leap of Faith," of an airborne bikini-donning beachgoer, afloat in the air as well as in our understanding of what's going on in the pictorial logic of the piece. Another leisure-timing, female figure is considered in Tracy Sylvester Harris' "The Pool," a faceless, poolside, femme fatale form painted with unfussy charismatic brushwork.

Definitions of "figurative art" can be elastic, of course, and we read Jon Francis' "portraits" of vintage Volkswagens as characters with personalities. Elsewhere in roadside manners, Mary-Austin Klein's weird, pristine little paintings take in the arid, bleak beauty to be seen in barren stretches of the Interstate 10 highway.

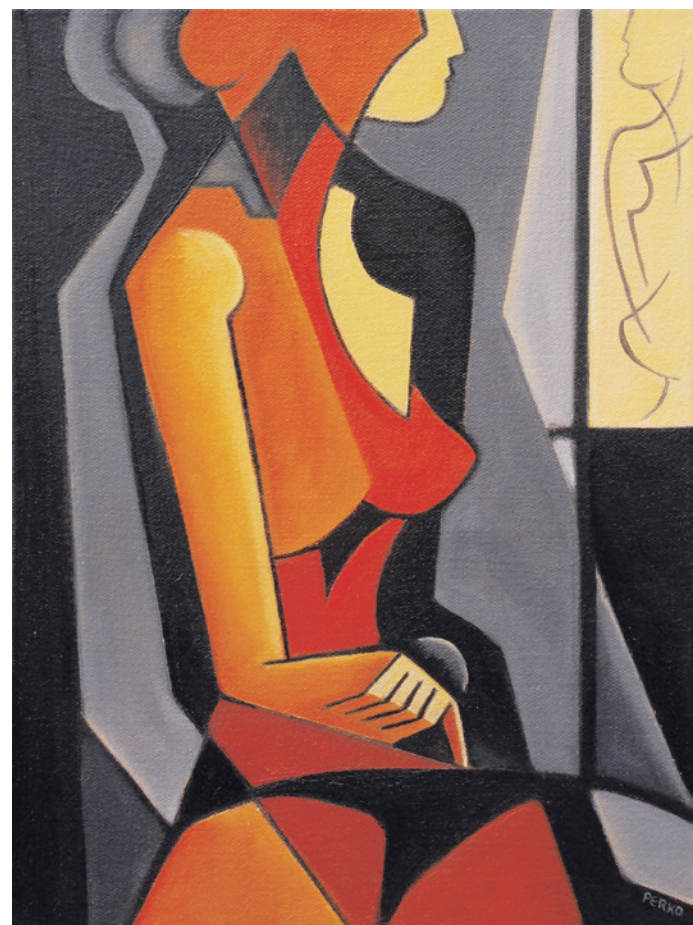
One of the show's odd charmers, Susan McDonell's "Big Bear," is a painting of the title's subject, and may be informed by the tourist/skier's haunt as well, given the stirring in of kitschy trompe l'oeil, flowery frame to add a strange extra contextual spin on things.

Word-related art in the show amounts to a modest theme-ette. Sean Anderson's "Buck the Trend" finds the title imposed on a handsome little painting of a cabin, while Paula Re ushers words and phrases upfront, like nattering thought bubbles, in "Casual Worries."

Relief sculpture amounts to a small but notable niche in the show. Nancy Gifford's "Whistleblower" is a resin-on-wood piece, at once sleekly polished and also provocative in its abstracted, absurd nature and reference points. Claire Little's nutty, cool rabbit-head "trophy" pieces occupy some middle zone between hip décor and a statement about hunter's pride, plus some irrational X factor.

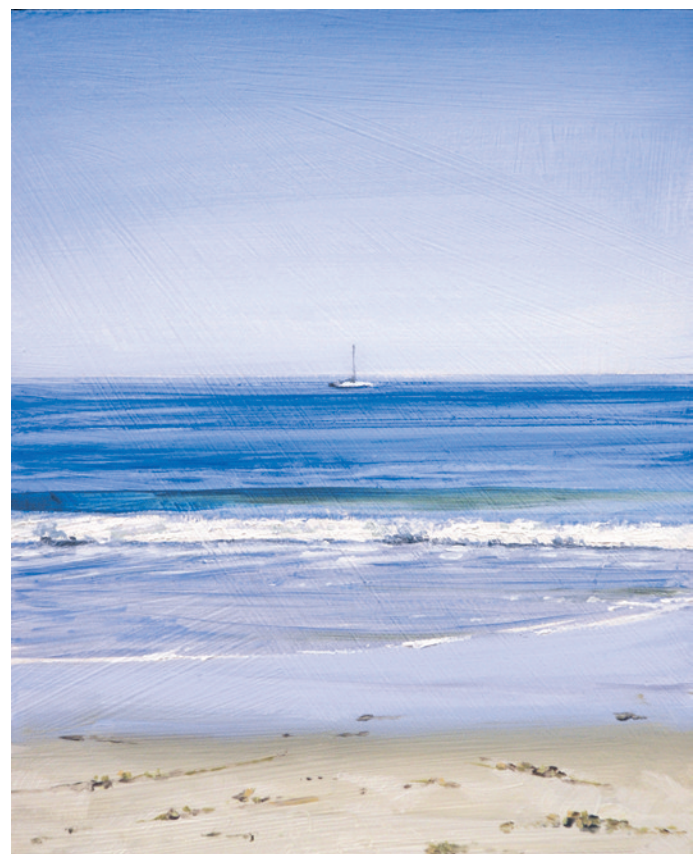
Jason Hadley's "Trouble Downstairs" arrives with a title coloring the experience of the viewing, with a festive and even seasonal-looking relief sculpture of a house form over flickering electric candles. Suddenly, armed with the title, we see potential, incendiary peril in what might have otherwise been an innocent holiday shrine.

In a similar way, James David Thomas' "Cabrillo" depicts a sunset over the idyllic sprawl of the Cabrillo Boulevard waterfront, which should be a postcard-perfect, Chamber of Commerce-ready, logo image, except for a certain strange detachment: the painting also seems to be a wry commentary on the romanticizing impulse of painters dealing with de facto beautiful subjects. Or is that just the Grinch speaking?



'Figure Orange,' Angela Perko

Sullivan Goss photos



'Summerland Boat,' John Nava

Needless to say, despite the small dimensions and pleasant aura of the gathering in this year's "100 Grand," there's a lot more going on in this gallery than an idle-minded holiday boutique.