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Garden of Artly Delights

Exhibition at Sullivan Goss Celebrates Floral Subjects in Art, Subjected to Various Degrees of Tradition and Reinvention



By [Josef Woodard](#)

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"Looking West" by Maria Rendon | Photo: Courtesy



"Calla" by John Nava | Photo: Courtesy

In spite of the dark and evil forces busily at work in the world (and the White House), cultural respite and festivity still comes home to roost for the holidays. That friendlier, "lightness of being" brand of spirit has landed in Sullivan Goss, which has been dubbed Santa Barbara's premier art salon (okay, I said that, a long time ago. But it's still true).

Like calendar clockwork, the annual (since 2009) *100 Grand* exhibition takes up the front gallery space in time for Christmastime, a win-win tradition of the gallery, showcasing a broad swath of artists (working in a Lilliputian scale and selling everything for less than \$1,000) and the "price is an object" art buyers.

Deeper into the gallery compound, flowers cometh, in varying shades and contexts. *Irresistible: Flowers & and Their Admirers*, curated by Jeremy Tessmer, celebrates a timeless turf and genre, with contemporary twists attached. The art here ranges from the relatively "straight" still life-ish stuff of Hank Pitcher's earthy "Flowers from Our Garden" and John Nava's pristine, vase-based "Callas" to the abstracting tacks of Yassi Mazandi's squint-visioned "Black Orchid" and sculptor Ken Bortolazzo's stainless-steel floral riffs. A strange delight emanates from the steely sheen of Bortolazzo's mobile "Wisteria" and the flower arrangement-like (or "derangement-like") "Lotus 3."

In the between zone of extremes, we find easy allure in the strikingly inventive visualizations of Maria Rendón's "Along Sisquoc River" — an atmospheric swath — and "Looking West," a surreal ode to the delicate yet powerfully mythic California poppies. Flowers go decoratively post-Pop in Bradley Greer's "Silverlaking" while Jean Donald Swiggett's "Flower Garden" cheekily imagines the Garden of Eden as a home for California beach-dweller-styled Adam and Eve, necessarily in the altogether.



"Flower Garden" by Jean Swiggett | Photo: Courtesy

Sculpture nuzzles against flowery formality in James Haggerty's funky floral ceramic creations, which may be suitable for cradling actual flora.



"The Portals - Baja Dune 2" by Blakeney Sanford | Photo: Courtesy

Famed sculptor/painter/printmaker Ellsworth Kelly (subject of an intriguing exhibition of his photography across the street at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art in 2023) weighs in with the lightest touch in the room, with the spare and linear lithograph "Daffodil."

Photography has a lean but potent presence in the overall show. Famed nature photographer Brett Weston's sinuous black-and-white image "Flowers, Wall, Hawaii" bears a truthful title, with a quiet poetic essence beneath the facts before us. Color is critical to the sneaky effect of Blakeney Sanford's *The Portals* series, in which landscape settings have the deliciously disorienting counterpoint of a Klein blue monolith — or "portal" — inserted into the scenery, as if in a dream.

Here, as in other points along the path of this show, elements of nature are set into cultural, and in this case canny, relief. The juxtaposition, central to the art of art about nature, causes us to consider both artistic and nature-based realities in simple, sometimes gently subversive gestures. Whatever the approach, the subject feels like a salon-worthy home for the holidays, much needed at the moment.

Irresistible: Flowers & and Their Admirers is on view at Sullivan Goss (11 E. Anapamu St.) through December 22. See sullivangoss.com/exhibitions/irresistible.



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