



Sullivan Goss

AN AMERICAN GALLERY
11 East Anapamu Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 730-1460

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SYSTEM DISRUPTION

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SANTA BARBARA, CA - Sullivan Goss is pleased to announce a new exhibition called **SYSTEM DISRUPTION** that seeks answers in visual art to one of the most important questions of our era – namely, what is the ideal balance between a system (or pattern) and its disruption? Everywhere you look these days, some system or another is being “disrupted”: from politics to technology to the climate itself. This exhibition doesn’t try to stake claims on any of these issues specifically, although some of the pieces may lean in one direction or another. Instead, the exhibition is organized around the idea that our eye sometimes “knows” things about the world before we have any rational or mathematical explanation. It therefore attempts to mine some of the best visual thinkers – artists – to see how we might better

balance the need for orderliness and predictability with the need for invention and change.

What might be said to constitute an art “system?” For the earliest artist in the exhibition, **Lockwood de Forest (1850-1932)**, his system involved working on a certain size substrate and often with similar proportions of land, sea, and sky. The size of the substrate, in turn, was based on proportions in his own body. De Forest painted outdoors, so the works had to be finished fairly quickly; and because they were painted on a thick paper material, he couldn’t go back in to turpentine out mistakes. The repetition of this one system allowed him the maximum freedom to develop and refine his subtle coloration and evocative brushwork as he painted all over the world. In his case, the “system” was both a format and a process.

The same might be said for **Nicole Strasburg**, whose small gouache paintings of images taken from a weather camera near her mountain home were born out of a desire to learn to paint in

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For images or other information requests, contact Nathan Vonk at 805.730.1460 or nathan@sullivangoss.com

gouache. Nicole began collecting these internet-borne weather camera shots before she decided to make a print of the basic forms of the landscape. She then paints on these prints, recording the ever changing landscape captured by the camera. One landscape painted in one size and one medium in all seasons nevertheless manages a striking amount of variety. Climatic change is more than enough disruption for her system.

Artist **Bob Nugent** also employs the idea of a similar format within a constrained process. In his case, he draws and paints studies of things he's noted along the Amazon river on to large sheets of wood veneer which he then slices in to 3 x 3 inch pieces. These smaller pieces are then collaged onto panels to create one foot by one foot nature studies. The artist himself is interested in how the filter of memory interacts with the photographic and written to transcribe experiences. But perhaps there is also a subtle message about the clear cutting of Amazon rainforests and the ever changing shape of the river itself?

R. Nelson Parrish was so intrigued by a process – the scraping of layers of wet spray paint – that he created a format and eventually a form around it. Painting numerous wet on wet layers of archival aerosol on cold pressed Arches paper, he soon realized that there wasn't time to do very much other than scrape stripes. (The paint would dry too quickly.) It wasn't long before the American flag emerged, and with it, content. No symbol more potent, more malleable, or – in the red and blue and black and white flags being shown here – more relevant.

Equally relevant to the current political dialogue are the #metoo series by **Nancy Gifford**. For her widely exhibited piece called *Lament*, the artist became a collector of old books. She then denudes these antique books of their interior texts, mounts them to birch panels, paints an open ruffle skirt, and adds legs in various postures. The titles then become signature elements that highlight the historic assumptions, associations, and biases that we bring to stories about women. Her animating concept here is the system, but it is a system designed to disrupt our discourse about certain “types” of girls.

Sometimes, the system is just a process, and not always a very defined process at that. **Rafael Perea de la Cabada** is an artist whose work evolves from impulse and practice through a series of intuitive moves and countermoves. There is no defined format. In the end, the process is recorded in the many layers, drips, and drawings of his finished pieces. In *Interferencia (Inteference)*, his system masks the original signal – his inspiration – with the noise of each pivot, suggesting that it is the disruptions that give his work its true life.

For **Nathan Hayden**, his system might better be understood as a creative practice. He draws... a lot. His small pictographic ink drawings organized around an axial symmetry with notations and observations of the moment help him to maintain a creative flow. The changes from one form to

the next are minor and suggest a kind of evolution of form. Creative disruptions are integrated, to keep the system going.

At the high-point of the Modernist experiment in the mid-century, artists like **Jules Engel (1915-2003)** of Los Angeles and **Sidney Gordin (1918-1996)** of New York and San Francisco worked to bring humanity and wit into geometric abstraction. Working with and against “the grid,” they pushed Formal boundaries to see what was possible. At the time, abstract art itself was considered a shock to the system.

Ann Diener’s system of drawing and collage represents places as they evolve through time, immigration, development, and decay. “Over-drawing” and adding digital photography or cut paper to the pieces represents the changes to these places wrought by these disruptive forces. Her swirling compositions of recognizable images record these disruptions as a system in and of themselves.

The idea of a system that feeds on its disruptions is epitomized in the latest evolution of **Ethan Turpin**’s feedback driven *Video Organism* piece. Organic geometries grow from his two camera setup to literally evolve new designs as it uses its output as an input. The public can then interact with this closed system to disrupt it, but the system will incorporate the disruption as part of the system. Perhaps no piece in the show better exemplifies the problems and potentialities of what happens when a closed system gets disrupted.

This exhibition was originally scheduled to open on 1st Thursday in January. Ironically and fittingly, the Thomas Fire disrupted our usual system.

Artists included in the exhibition: LOCKWOOD DE FOREST | Ann Diener | Jules Engel | Nancy Gifford | SIDNEY GORDIN | Nathan Hayden | Bob Nugent | R. Nelson Parrish | Rafael Perea de la Cabada | NICOLE STRASBURG | Ethan Turpin

Come to the opening. Visit, explore, collect! 1st Thursday, February 1, 2018 from 5–8pm.