

Press-Telegram

Second City's second sex

The downtown gallery is presenting an exhibit of women's art that is as diverse as its creators

By Shirle Gottlieb

Special to the Press-Telegram

THE SECOND City Council is less than two years old, and already it is attracting attention from all over the state.

The brainchild of photographer Cheryl Bennett (who is assisted by her indefatigable husband, Dwight, and her mother, Camilla), this community art gallery is devoted to supporting California artists, the arts and art education.

Exhibits rotate throughout the year, with a different theme and distinguished curator for each show. Last month, Archie Boston (chair of CSULB's design department) curated a show in honor of Black History Month. In the near future, Pat Morrison has agreed to jury an exhibit of work that combines words with visual imagery.

This month is devoted to women artists, and Barbara Drucker (internationally known artist and chair of UCLA's art department) is the juror for The Second City Council's first "Women's Festival."

Once again, we're confronted with a large group show where each artwork on exhibit vies for your attention. Running the gamut from soft, gentle, poetic pieces to blatant feminist art that makes strong political statements, this exhibit is as diverse as the women who created it.

In addition, there is plenty of humor; irony, and social satire. How could it be otherwise? It's impossible to miss "I See You, See Me," Ginger Thompson's strong oil painting of a woman whose face is covered but whose breasts are bare; or "9/11," Sara Cordon's poignant floor sculpture of a dead female nude that is burnt and scarred.

A delightful black and white photograph by Christine Luksza depicts seven pregnant women floating on their backs like so many "Lily Pads"; while the silver prints of Michelle Ricci-Koch capture butterfly orchids and two delicate bird's nests balanced on a branch - one with three eggs and the other with only one.

Delores Williams' installation is certain to stop you in your tracks. On an aluminum table sit three specimen jars labeled "Leguminosae Toxicum," "Leguminosae Infestus" and "Leguminosae Fatalis." With strange ears of genetically altered corn floating in each jar, "From Mendel to Monsanto" refers to 'controversial scientific techniques in agriculture.

By contrast, Gerri Johnson-McMillin has woven a tiny, delicate "Fishbone Vessel" out of an albacore fish bone, monofilament and glass beads; and 6 year-old Ashley Tallichet has drawn two charming chalk-pastel drawings of a raccoon and a deer.

Jill Ingram Fitterer has created "To Dementia," a one-of-a-kind accordion book that combines five lovely etchings with a sensitive poem dedicated to her grandmother. **While referencing artificial insemination, Anne Pinkowski has stuffed a guitar full of eggs and a length of neon tubing with egg-shaped rocks.**

If you're familiar with Joseph Beuys, you'll get a kick out of the "Felt Suit" that Robin McCauley has dedicated to him. But what her "Hair Shoes" represent (satin pumps sprouting long strands of hair) is completely beyond me.

The two large narrative paintings are compelling. "Jess," a realistic work by Tracy Vera, depicts a nude redhead standing bored and impatient in the bedroom, while her male, fully clothed companion turns away from her toward the television.

In a different style entirely, Jennifer Hams uses broad, loose, gestural brush strokes to paint a lonely "Empty Room" with nothing but a sewing machine and space that drips with silence.

That leaves Samantha Nieman's "Centipede Eating Breast", a colorful, decorative, all-over patterned watercolor, for viewers to interpret all by themselves.

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