

ART REVIEW: Chips off the Artistic Block - The Arts Fund's Teen Mentorship Program goes public with its annual spring exhibition

By Josef Woodard, News-Press Correspondent

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ART REVIEW

'Spring Teen Mentorship Exhibition'

When: through June 22

Where: Arts Fund Gallery, 205C Santa Barbara St.

Gallery hours: 1-5 p.m. Wed.-Fri., 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Sat.

Information: 965-7321, artsfundsb.org

Various changes have taken shape down at the Arts Fund Gallery, an anchor art space and artistic energy engine in the heart of the Funk Zone. Renovation of the space itself has made it more exhibition-friendly and flexible, while an evolving sense of its mission and exhibition schedule — more varied, curated shows, for instance — have changed the way it does art business, as well as the way we look at the host organization.

One of the holdovers in its mission statement, though, is a strong commitment to arts mentorship of Santa Barbara's fledgling, high school-aged artists, via the Teen Mentorship Program. Hearing about the program second-hand, or reading about it, is one thing. Seeing the artistic results, as at the current "Spring Teen Mentorship Exhibition" in the gallery, offers an inspiring, on-the-ground and now on-the-wall sense of validation for the worth of the enterprise, and the teen talent base involved.

For the current batch of young artists, the mentors



'Untitled,' Grace Budgett
Arts Fund Santa Barbara photos



Wearing Face,' Julian Littlehale



'Stress and Anxiety exemplified by
Bowls of Fruit/Tajo McBurnie

involved were Nevin Littlehale (bronze casting), Michael Irwin (painting), Elizabeth Schwyzer (creative writing) and Philip Van Nostrand (digital photography). While the creative writing aspect of this spring program was showcased in a reading at the exhibition opening, the other three media make for an invitingly diverse public forum for the artists.

In photography, each artist presents a unique point of view. Ethan Steiner's close-up views delve into the focal play of depth-of-field gone deep, while Danielle Weitzman's crisp macro-close-up rose blossoms revel in the seductive complexity of petals. Jessany Rodenas finds visual and sub-cultural intrigue in small aircraft in the "plane series," while Josh Van Orsdel's images include a wry view of an outdoor sculpture, which has been collaboratively adorned by bird dung.

Sculpture comes in many shapes, sizes and degrees of finish, and with many messages attached. Mirra Tubiolo's self-explanatory "Dragon Scepter" fits in your hand, mixing dragon lore with hardware store lore, and Tajo McBurnie's spindly bronzed tableau, with the teasing title "Stress and Anxiety Exemplified by Bowl of Fruit" seems to tap a blending of Giacometti and Heavy Metal comics.

On the junkier, more eco-oceanic tip, Lindsay DePledge's "Neptune's Wrath" — which looks like a holdover from the gallery's last show, "The Big Splash" — takes aim at the scourge of ocean pollution, with found objects found at the scene of the crime. Julian Littlehale's sculpture "Wearing Face" riffs off the stereotyped "see no evil, speak no evil, hear no evil" archetype, but with one added, void face to the mix.

Among the paintings in the show, many are variations on the thematic effect of abstract, textural pieces structured in vertical bands, with layered colored and gnarled gestures or paint application techniques balanced and bounded by structural grids. The concept takes multiple forms, from the rug-like patterning of Kela Johnson's "Navaho" to the anarchic fandango of Sofia Vermuelen's "Maelstrom." Morgan Remy's "Cake Toppings," true to the title, is an airy, subtle and, yes, sweet twist on the structural theme, while Jesse Lindsey's "Cake" is more physically palpable, apparently slathered up into three-dimensions with a palette knife.

Elsewhere in the painting camp, and coming from elsewhere, conceptually, Christian Pedersen mixes abstract strategies with ghoulish faces, and Kela Johnson's "Ephemeral" — both the title and content of the painting — is a large but friendly, Ed Ruscha-styled word painting on a wood grainy background. Julia Kuplec's pieces are delicate, calligraphic statements, and Ben Weininger's tree ring-suggestive etude of line and texture gesture in the direction of nature, abstraction, and time's passage.

Saavan Sagar's "Bee Keeper" finds its artistic energy at the juncture of a crisp drawing of a bee perched on a woman, atop a textured green space, and Grace Budgett presents a nice and neat, yet vaguely surreal, geometric and abstraction interior-like piece.

In short, this spring brings along yet another promising crop of young artistic voices, faces and energies, mentored into shape and available for all to see in the hosting gallery by the sea.