

# Then and now, continued

'Fast Forward 2009' expands on the generous gift of the Barry Berkus and Family Collection to the County two years ago

By Josef Woodard  
NEWS PRESS CORRESPONDENT

Two years ago, architect and avid contemporary art collector Barry Berkus made a more than generous gift to the Santa Barbara County Arts Commission — and, by extension, a gift to us, the taxpayers and art-interested among us. Berkus gave numerous pieces in his collection, mostly chronicling the work of artists who lived or passed through the Santa Barbara area from the '70s through the '90s, in honor of his late wife Gail, who was instrumental in building the collection.

Besides the virtue of bolstering the county's permanent collection, this specific body of work also serves as a valuable regional and historical resource. For anyone who might have thought that Santa Barbara artists of the past 30-plus years were mild-mannered sorts, estranged from the contemporary and conceptual tides of the larger fine art scene, or simply content to paint landscapes, this is an inspiring "think again" proposition.

What we find in the current exhibition "Fast Forward 2009: Selections from the Berkus Family Collection," now at the Channing Peake Gallery, is an extension of the original collection's strengths, amended by a "where are they now" side dish. Curator Heather Jenó Silva brings us more or less up to date on the status of artists represented by older works in the original collection, making for a ripe source of comparison between their art, then and now.

Printmaker and highly paper-sensitive artist Harry Reese, for example, has followed a smooth evolutionary path over the years, from his 1992 monotype through to smaller, more colorful, smaller and epigrammatic pieces dating from 2009. Another UCSB-based artist, Dan Connolly, is seen both through his 1995 black and white mixed media and Biblical-based piece "WEG" and, in stark contrast, the vibrantly energetic, ritualistic, abstract painting "A Small Fire," circa 2004.

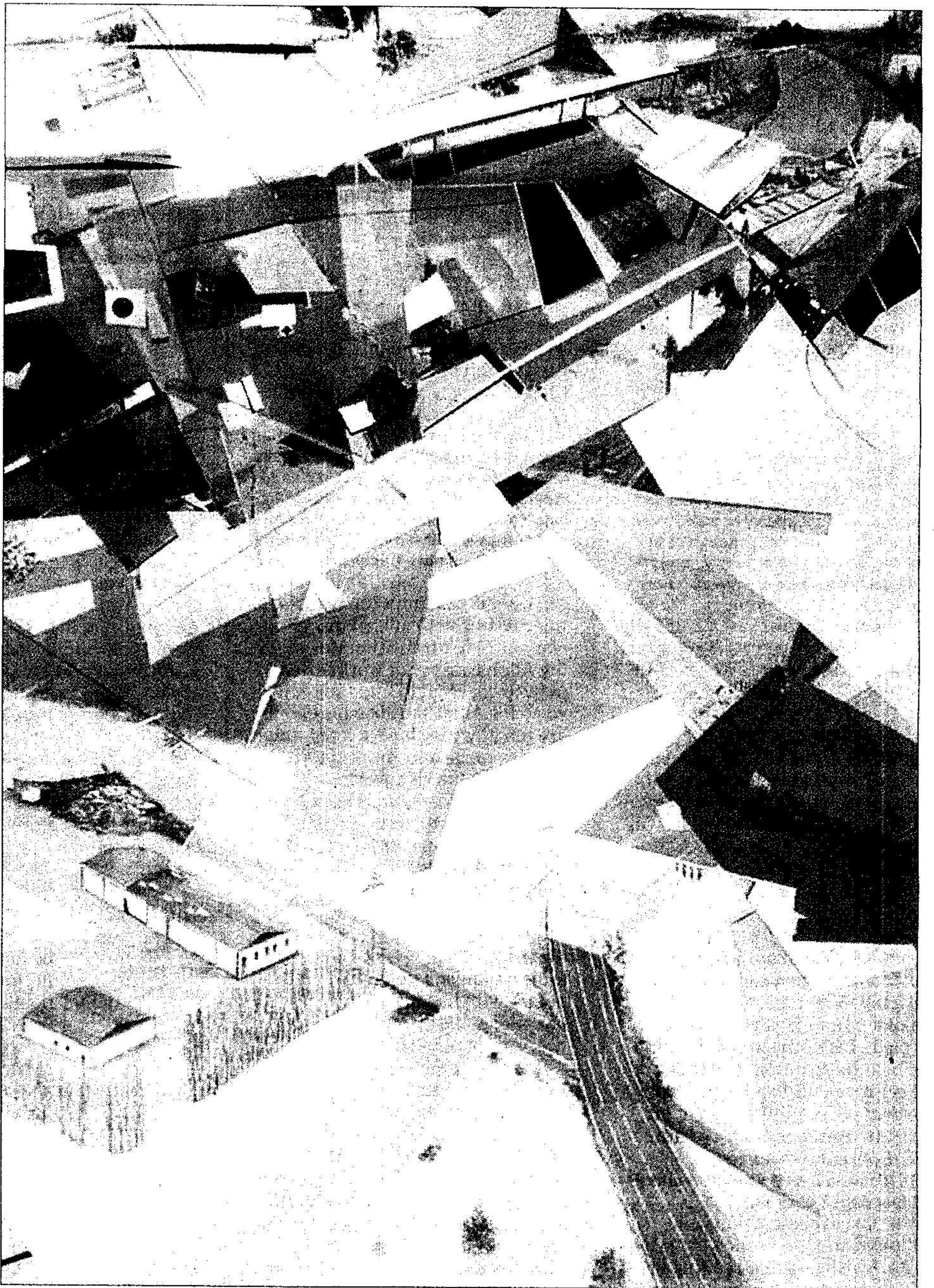
Photographer Jeff Brouws, who has since moved east and gone on to acclaim for his dryly witty and sensitive color work, shows both a vintage County Fair image, "Panda Bear," along with a composite piece from last year, "Guyton Dots in Situ, Detroit." In the newer piece, Brouws cleverly combines nine separate images, conjoined by the graphic element of a dot in the various scruffy urban scenes.

In other photography, Ginny Brush's earlier interest in vernacular images, represented here by a 1997 parking lot amusement ride shot — not unlike Brouws' work — morphed into her more recent art, cannily combining text and image. Timothy Hearsum, once Santa Barbara Museum of Art's curator, shows a few of his evocative new cloudscape triptychs, while Sky Bergman demonstrates her transformation from fine art photographer into a sentient and artful photojournalist.

Sam Erenberg's large, minimal and vaporous paintings circa 2003-04, are larger and more dramatic extensions of his earlier work from the collection, while Dimitri Kovyev's 2004 "All is Well #8" — contrasting with his more spare early work in the Collection — is a dense yet cool quasi-collage-like painting, suggesting convoluted aerial topography, with hints of surveillance culture. Lawrence Argent, known for his public art endeavors, is seen via his odd macro-close-up, deep-focus photographs of rubber nipples, playfully confusing our sense of scale and bearings.

And then there is the intriguing, peculiar work of Ken Hendrickson, whose dreamy pastiche of memories, contained in a 1981 watercolor from the original Berkus collection, gives way to a set of newer, smaller collage pieces of a more recent vintage, similarly dreamy and all about self-referential cross-stitchery.

A central aspect of this intriguing exhibition is the idea of a continuing saga in motion. In the ongoing story of the Berkus collection, as with any long-haul overview, artists' work and creative processes are stories in flux, best appreciated as such. ■



JOSEF WOODARD PHOTOS



Dimitri Kovyev's "All is Well" suggests convoluted aerial topography, with hints of surveillance culture attached. Below left is Dan Connolly's "A Small Fire," from 2004.

## ART REVIEW

### 'FAST FORWARD 2009: SELECTIONS FROM THE BERKUS FAMILY COLLECTION'

**When:** through June 19

**Where:** Channing Peake Gallery, County Administration Building, 105 E. Anapamu St.

**Gallery hours:** 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday

**Information:** 568-3990, [www.sbartscommission.org/galleries.html](http://www.sbartscommission.org/galleries.html)