

Art as Funny 'Hmm'

SCENE MAGAZINE 10/5/12
SANTA BARBARA NEWS PRESS

STRONG, WELL-STOCKED EXHIBITION AT COLLEGE OF CREATIVE STUDIES

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'This Was Funny Yesterday'

When: through October 19
Where: UCSB College of Creative Studies
Gallery hours: 1 to 5 p.m.,
Tuesday through Friday
Information: 893-2364



UCSB College of Creative Studies photo
'Chaircrow,' Martin Kersels



Josef Woodard photo
'Corpse Flower,' Martin Kersels

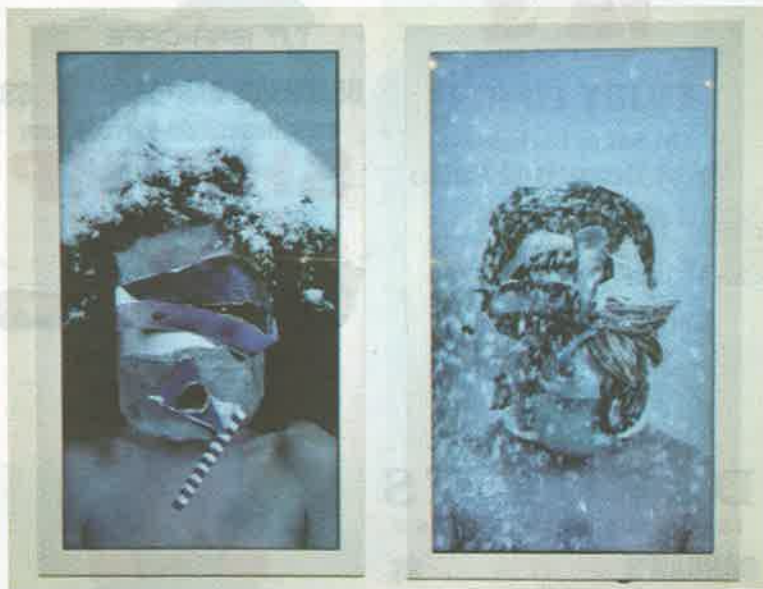
As perhaps a gross generalization, fine art has flexed its sense of humor sparingly over the last Millennium, reserving the comic side of expression and humanity for subtle gestures or the domain of crackpots and satirists off to the side of serious culture. But things shifted by degrees in the 20th century, through the dark humor of the German Expressionists, say, or the line of absurdist glee carried on a rabbit's hole trajectory through Dada, Fluxus and the post-Conceptualist playground, where ideas — including funny ones — merge with "serious" aesthetic inquiry.

Which leads us to "This Was Funny Yesterday" a strange and delightful little show at the College of Creative Studies gallery, up for a few weeks and well worth a visit.

Co-curated by Jane Mulfinger and Stephanie Washburn, the show features such noted artists as conceptualist Vito Acconci, Martin Kersels, and the unique Brian Bress, whose wonderfully subversive show at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art over the summer was one of this year's taste treats of the art season in town.

A veteran of the business of asserting absurdist notions with deeper allusions to the human condition, Mr. Acconci sets the stage for the exhibition with his 1970 piece "Blinks." Using multiple crude photographs, graphs and mock-scientific displays, the artist presents the results of an experiment in which the artist walked around NYC and stopped to snap a photo each time he blinked. It's a clever art gag on some level, but with an existential, ephemeral subplot referring to the temporal and bodily experience of the human experience.

A different spin on the rethought self-portrait comes through in John Divola's "As Far as I Could Get," in which the artist is seen as a mystical presence down a road, having raced as far away from the camera as possible within its 10-second self-timer mechanism would allow. But the idea of racing away from the art apparatus, in addition to the enigmatic look of a murky nocturnal black and white image on museo rag turns a simple idea into a striking image, and an investigation of being.



UCSB College of Creative Studies photo
'Pair (Justin, Cara),' Brian Bress

Art about art, the absurdity of border politics, and a literal matter of terra firma converge in the multimedia presentation "El Pedon," by Camilo Ontiveros. A conceptualist "earth work" art project involving digging out a mound of Mexican dirt and transporting it — or attempting to — to the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles took on political dimensions when the "art material" was held up at the border, and the stymied art project became a different sort of process and per-

formance art, documented here in video, quite lovely color photographs and a book.

In what might appear to be a more straightforward use of the photography medium, Ms. Washburn's crisp color prints seize upon a volatile and somehow alternate view of reality as we think we know it. Extreme events — a danger-coated fiery flash in "Reception (Combustion)" and a surreally airborne blonde wig in "Reception (Goldylocks)" — are swathed in a

deceptively calm and elegant formality in her art, nicely dislodging our preconceptions, as art and humor will do.

An anonymous artistic entity known as D3 proposes an elaborate ersatz variation on the "document destruction" industry, but supposedly geared toward putting away childish things and "emotionally burdensome objects" destruction. And that elaborate ruse is set next to the token old school painting in the show, Allison Miller's homely patternistic abstraction "Navy."

A certain clownish irrationality — and childlike wonder — attends the found, funk-lined sculptures of Mr. Kersels, perched mid-gallery like sentries of madcap mentality anchoring the show. "Spitball" is a deconstructed and reconstructed dictionary, fittingly enough, while "Chaircrow" combines the stuff of a chair and torn shirts to imply a figurative presence.

As for Mr. Bress' own bizarre and dream-like figurative art, the loopy charm of his SBMA pieces continues here in the form of wintry video/performance/tableaux pieces, disguised as static portraits of Cubist-flavored faces, but turning into, as Monty Python-ite theory puts it, something completely different.