

THE SACRAMENTO BEE [sacbee.com](http://www.sacbee.com)

This story is taken from [Sacbee](#) / Art Galleries

Axis: The little gallery that could ... go national

Bee Art Correspondent

Published Friday, Aug. 07, 2009

Axis Gallery, the nonprofit space next to the Center for Contemporary Art, Sacramento, is a little gallery that thinks big.

For its fourth national juried exhibition, the gallery intrepidly asked Janet Bishop, curator of painting and sculpture at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, to be the judge.

That chutzpah paid off. Bishop accepted and assembled a show of works by artists from all over the United States that gives us a look at what she describes as a landscape of new art to be explored.

"It is my hope," Bishop wrote in her juror's statement, "that visitors to Axis during the run of the show will take the time to make discoveries that will delight and inspire, that the local artists will take pride in this presentation as a small part of Sacramento's rich cultural life, and that the artists from afar will enjoy having their works on view in the heat of California's capital this summer."

Certainly pride is much in evidence, said Sandra Beard, who participated in the installation of the show. Several artists from around the country are planning to fly in for the opening reception Saturday night, and Axis members are busting their buttons over having pulled off a coup in attracting Bishop to judge the show.

Bishop selected 39 works from a field of 1,013 entries for the show with an eclectic yet erudite eye. The exhibition ranges from abstraction to realism, from well-crafted sculptural objects to photographs. If there is an overriding theme, it would seem to be a penchant on Bishop's part for brightly patterned abstractions. Two of these, along with a small sculpture, were winners of the three juror's awards.

"I Have a Bomb in My Head" by Sheena Gabrielli of Hellertown, Pa., is a three-dimensional painting that might be described as a kind of raucous synchronism of blaring musical rhythms in brash color. It seems, as Beard pointed out, to sum up the state of mind of a young artist confronted with too many choices and directions to follow.

"Gene Pool (II)" by Peter Combe of San Francisco is a subtler work but no less vibrant in its way. Made up of punched-out paint chips, it offers a landscape of colors that range from a bold rainbow of hues to muted pastels depending on the angle from which you view it. It's

beautifully constructed and endlessly fascinating to look at, with the pastel side of the circular forms printed with color information in English, Spanish and French.

The third juror's award went to "Tonka Tail" by Kurt Dyrhaug of Beaumont, Texas. Suggesting a hybrid toy – part truck, part airplane – it takes the form of the tail fin of a miniature plane atop wheels from roller skates or coasters. Made of weathered cast iron, it's a charming piece that hovers between enigma and nostalgia.

Equally arresting is a beautifully crafted wood sculpture by Stephen Eakin of Stockton in which a video of a name tag is screened on the side of an elegantly finished wooden file box, which pays homage to the artist's deceased father.

Abstractions in the show range from "Fibonacci's Chessboard," an optical puzzle in which red and blue squares morph into rectangles according to mathematical principles, by William M. Tarnowski of Boston, to a subtle canvas with roseate tones of poured paint by Kuzana Ogg of Santa Fe, N.M.

I particularly liked "Toobyrooby," a three-dimensional piece reminiscent of a puff ball you might find in Alice's wonderland by Lea Anderson of Rio Rancho, N.M.; and "Red Dynamo," a musical arrangement of rich colors that seem to be melting and warping in dynamic patterns by Richard Ashby of Sacramento.

Among the ventures into representational work, a diptych by Andrew Ek of Pacifica stands out. It takes the form of two paintings, one of the artist, the other of his wife, reaching out to each other across the gap between the two canvasses. Tending toward photorealism, it comes off as a surreal scene of startled protagonists set against a thunderously dark seascape.

Also surreal is "Surfing Serenade" by Julie Alvarado of San Leandro. This small canvas is a primitively painterly scene of surfers with women on their shoulders, one of whom is quixotically playing an accordion. It's a delightfully off-the-wall image.

There are several strong photographs in the show, among them a color photo of a formal garden in Prague, the Czech capital, by Mark Cohen of Folsom and a humorous shot of a man on a cell phone near a crowd gathered around a triangular light reflection on the wall of the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, by Bill Goidell of Davis. The most intriguing is "Lovers in the Park," a shot of long tubular forms resembling giant banded snakes coupling on a park bench, by Sorcha Meek of Hood River, Ore.

With a few exceptions that make you scratch your head, it's a strong show and will be interesting to compare with the upcoming State Fair show of California artists. Bishop is to be congratulated for doing a thoughtful and thorough job of putting together a small show with big ambitions that addresses the national scene.

ShareThis
Buzz up!