

# Axis Gallery's annual juried show brings national art recognition to Sacramento

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Every August, Axis Gallery chases away the summer doldrums with a national juried exhibition that livens things up in a slow season. It's a small gallery but the show has big intentions, gaining national recognition for bringing outstanding works from around the country to Sacramento.

One of the reasons for the strength of the show over the years is the jurors Axis selects to vet the work. Joe Amrhein, a Californian who has made waves in New York in recent years as the director of the Pierogi Gallery in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, N.Y., brought a seasoned and thoughtful eye to the task of assembling this year's exhibit.

Taking an eclectic approach, Amrhein included examples of a wide range of styles from representational figurative work, such as a noir-tinged scene of a young girl's birthday party by Nicole Santiago of Williamsburg, Va., to intricate and precise abstractions such as "Entropy," a light-infused and intricately precise abstraction by Ander Mikalson of Brooklyn.

The only things missing are naive work, which Amrhein finds out-of-date in a world in which the Internet holds sway, and extremely derivative work that fails to acknowledge its sources.

Along the way, you will find a pair of charming and witty collages by La Thoriel Badenhausen of New York, and Louise Captein of Galena, Ohio. These small but certainly not insignificant works are beguilingly offhand yet compelling. Captein's miniature abstraction calls up associations with the antic spirit of Hassel Smith. Badenhausen's is like an updated, illuminated version of a Kurt Schwitters.

There are a number of strong photographs on view from "Reach for the Stars," a shot of a city skyline reflected in an Anish Kapoor sculpture by Jess Bournay of Ferndale, Mich., to "The White Room (Ladder)," a witty view of a woman's legs ascending a ladder in a bare room by Katherine Du Tiel of San Francisco. Henrique Bafulho, also of San Francisco, offers a trenchant view of a prison in which prisoner and guards are indistinguishable, while Laura Rusnak of Columbus, Ohio, gives us a whimsical, delicately colored print of crossing signs on a rural road that warn against cattle, runners, riders on horseback and



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One of the big surprises is a conceptual piece, which at the outset of the show is a blank wall taped off to a rectangle in which the artist, Brad Thiele of Chico, will do a colored pencil drawing during the course of the show, leaving the shavings from the pencils on the ground underneath the piece. This is a risky but refreshing choice that offers an opportunity for a kind of ad hoc spirit to prevail in one corner of the show.

Also conceptual in spirit is Chicago artist Brittany Ransom's intriguing time-lapse photo of the neon-green tracks of beetles on a tree trunk, which won one of the juror's awards. It's a fascinatingly manipulated image that has an otherworldly air. Next to it is another juror's award winner, a split-canvas image by Forrest Solis of Phoenix of a girl zipping up a dress juxtaposed with a cautionary passage from a manual on adolescence. A gloss on gender and identity politics, it is a thought-provoking piece.

Nearby is a stunning pastel and charcoal drawing of ghostlike circular tables and geometric chairs by Maggie Evans of Savannah, Ga., which also received a juror's award. The brilliantly controlled particulate pointillism of the drawing, poised between abstraction and representation, gives the image a diaphanous, atmospheric quality that makes it hard to resist. Like the juror-award-winning "December, 2009," an abstraction made of tiny, feathery lines by Nancy Brown of Bowlett, Texas, it has a kind of rigor that characterizes much of the stronger works in the show.

Craft alone is not the determiner of Amrhein's choices, but an intensity of effort applied to unlikely subjects characterizes many of his selections that add up to a nourishing and enjoyable show.

## FIFTH NATIONAL JURIED EXHIBITION

Where: Axis Gallery,

1517 19th St., Sacramento

When: Noon-5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, and by appointment, through Aug. 29.

Cost: Free

Information: (916) 443-9900

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