Young Art on the Brinks

ON VIEW AT UCSB'S AD&A MUSEUM, THIS YEAR'S CROP OF EIGHT MFA STUDENTS, ONCE AGAIN DELIVERS, WITH ART AT ONCE INNOVATIVE, THOUGHTFUL, EDGY, AND SENSES-GRABBING.

By Josef Woodard,
News-Press Correspondent

"Temporary Clash: Graduate MFA show"
When: through June 2
Where: Art, Design & Architecture
Museum, UCSB
Hours: noon to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday

museum.ucsb.edu

B y now, we've grown accustomed to the annual humble articles thatThe Exhibitio can be some-
ting of a cerebral circus, along with
its deeper messages and conceptual fiber. The practicalities of the annual event—often one of the most intriguing art events of the season in town, for various reasons—revolve around a public forum and transition moment for young artists moving beyond a certain, presumably into the professional, MFA in hand and on the
cus. Thanks to the energy and pluck of youth, mixed with the demands of creating and honing a personal aesthetic in the University's MFA pro-
gam (a more highly regarded program than in years past), the goods and ideas can be freshly provocative to outside eyes. On first impression through deeper consideration of the show, this year's group—Maizie Hansen, Madeline Eve Ignor, Adam John, Kayla Masters, Elise Ortega Menilli, Andrew Morrison, Echo Thebar and Christopher Anthony Velasco—serve up plenty of movement, color, texture, context gone wild and social aware-
ness.

The show delivers on all the fronts we expect of it. Here, the definition of MFA—Master of Fine Arts—might also be extended to include the qualifications of "fun" (in a loaded way) and "fearless" art. Each artist is given a dedicated corner or area of the museum space in which to work, sometimes using the space to installation-minded ends. Mr. Jahn's corner, close to the entrance, sets our attention through its invention, use of unexpected objects on unconventional ends. A bicycle has been transformed into an art-making object, with a fitted paint-dispenser and stenciled tires and ready to make its mark, as illustrated in the video art "Inifinity Painting #2," showing the artist bike in action.

His striking junk sculpture "The Table," suggesting a micro-Mayan temple married to a nuclear reactor, is comprised of colored electric exten-
sion cords, nestled on Astroturf and with a hum of dread beneath its gaudy color scheme. Ms. Ignor's art nook is given over to her large, loose and jangly variation on the collaging theme, from discrete collage to an entire wall design, "wall collage"—sparingly filled with detritus and minimalist charm. Lesters and fragmented allusions creep into her art, whether the Hollywood sign in her diptych "LA girl/brain room," or the doubly-intended phrase "ABOUT time," in "time."

More primal associations to shape, texture and object relations are embedded in Ms. Menilli's installation (or menagerie) of sculptures called "Reminders." Combining metal structures, second-hand textiles (read re-wool and repurposed lingerie and stockinette and pine sculpture), the artist has assembled a personal sculpture garden which seems ritualistic and vaguely archaelogical. One can also find a certain Dr. Seuss-in character in this goofy, integrated community of art objects.

The museum's back gallery is given over to a group of distinctly different artists. Multi-media and programming-oriented artist Echo Thebar's "stand 11" is a cozy, varied display: Video/computer graphics, seemingly surreptitious government documents, a war room strategy board—blended into a jumbled convergence of info, coated (and coded) with implications of life in the post-9/11, dronewriter-
era.

Christopher Anthony Velasco's "Fresh Denon" series heeds a much simpler plan, at least on the surface. Altered and half-destroyed Polaroid sources are then re-photographed and somehow convey an allegorical sense of medical calamity and disorder, through stained, melted and otherwise SNAFU-ed images. To take in the work and larger artistic ethic of Mr. Morrison, proceed outside. On the right side of the museum's façade, beneath the plaza and "Art," "Design and Architecture" (the basis of the AD&A, "acronym"), the artist shows one of his murals. But it is a subdued model, without the extravagant intensity and pictorial density often marking the medium. Mr. Morrison's work incorporates monumental, video documentary, social activism and indigenous people's rights, making an impact here through relatively subtle means and scale. The museum mural ambiguously depicts a Native American ceremony, with a gray scale palette and in an impressionistic style, while maintaining a vibrant expressivity. The mural's power is half-harnessed by the site's very understatement of its effect.

In another corner of the main gallery, we get a taste of the socially-turnt-in sensibilities of Mr. Hansen, whose time as an MFA candidate included a run for the mayor of Santa Barbara. Her 6 x 6 foot mock "tiny house" sculpture here, "How to San Luisivo (Mi Casa Es Su Casa)," in varying states of finish and scarpiness, is ostensibly for sale and up for auction for the low price of under $30,000. She takes aim at the exorbitant real estate rental market in Santa Barbara, while also questioning the murky mix of cultural histories in the area between Mexican, Spanish and imperialist forces.

Ms. Hansen also shows a loud, fiery painting, "Fire/Heats of Paradise," slyly cross-stitching the visual charm of an exotic blossom and the peril of incendary outbursts, a brand of anger in the news in parts over the past year and a half.

Spot fires, it so happens, also pop up as visual motifs in the fascinating and "against type" fabric art of Kayla Mates, whose centerpiece is called "Firewall," a term of multiple meanings. Fire itself is a character in the large, complex pictorial mesh of the piece, along with the implied issues of security in the word "firewall," soft-to-the-touch bricks, a gaggle of little yellow sail (and bashing) emotion faces and references to modern questions both anguishing and trivial—such as the phrase "will Moviefat survive?" Ms. Mates puts the metaphorical pin point in what is presumably the comfort craft of needlepoint, and other fabric crafty techniques. On another wall, she shows fabric signs, as if protest rally-ready posters, consisting simply of corporate Twitter responses to flashpoint moments in the Trump era, from Skates, Tic-Tac and Tiki brand products, the latter disowning any connection to Charleston's neo-Nazi Tiki-gang. The art innocently plucks surfaces doing anything but self-peddle the underlying message of social concern.

With this piece, and others in the Museum, young artists are finding personal routes to expressing what it means to be an artist in this historical moment, to be alive, alert, fired-up, and now with MFAs in the back pocket. ©