

Catch one of the best ever Crocker-Kingsley exhibitions in Roseville

February 2, 2017

Squeak Carnwath, professor emerita at the University of California, Berkeley, who judged this year's competition, is a highly regarded California artist who has won many prestigious awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship and two Individual Artist Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts.

I've been going to the Crocker Kingsley shows since 1964, and I can say without hesitation that this is among the best ones I have ever seen. With multiple works by several artists, it's more like a thoughtfully curated museum show than a hodge-podge of unrelated works. Further, the quality of execution is on a very high level.

From a field of 1,591 pieces by 487 artists, Carnwath selected 41 pieces by 22 artists for the 78th Crocker Kingsley on view at Blue Line Arts in Roseville and awarded five cash prizes ranging from \$250 to \$2,000. Works by the prize winners and an additional five artists selected by the Crocker Art Museum staff will be shown at the museum March 5-May 7.

The Best of Show Award went to "Vanitas Man," a mixed media work by Allan Gordon. With references to both the recent police shootings of African American men and traditional vanitas paintings from 17th-century Dutch art, it's a timely work layered with reminders of the transience of life and the omnipresence of death.

First place went to "Earth Mother," a fluffy, white, hanging ball made of sheep skin and baby bottle nipples, by Rebecca Edwards. Both humorous and disturbing, inviting and repellant, it's a quirky and intriguing piece that interrogates the concept of motherhood and the state of the planet with a kind of Merie Oppenheim surrealism and a Wileyesque punning title.

"Once Upon a Time," a steel, paper and cast aluminum sculpture by Steven Davis, took second place. It's a life-size figure of a grandmotherly type wearing a slip and a Mickey Mouse hat. She is standing on a bench and adjusting a noose around her neck. The mouse ears give it a comical touch, but the noose is unsettling. It's ambiguous as to whether she is putting the noose on or taking it off. The title suggests a fairy tale but also makes you think that Grammy may have had it with baby sitting all the time.

Third place went to Tania Houtzager for "Rest," a wall sculpture made of hydrocal plaster, linen and wood that harkens to the spirit of *arte povera* in the simplicity and humility of its materials. Quiet as a whisper, it takes the form of a pale ecru square on a white frame with slight indentations that suggest finger prints left in sand or memory foam. It movingly deals with the act of leaving one's mark and the transitory nature of art and life.

Earning an honorable mention perhaps for its sheer cheekiness, Andy Cunningham's impudent acrylic on wood panel, "Floating on White," a raw painting of brightly colored, stacked-up forms that suggest flattened doughnuts with drips of paint that rise rather than fall.

I liked almost everything in this show, but especially Tyrell Collins' exquisite, meditative oil pencil on black paper drawings made up of numerous fine lines of atmospheric color that are moving and mysterious as Vija Celmins' obsessive drawings or Mark Rothko's poignant abstract paintings.

Other works that stood out for me were Siddarth Parasnis' stunning oil on canvas urban landscape "Eternity #78;" Mark Bauer's intricately detailed, labyrinthine, Bosch-like acrylics on canvas; Sheldon Greenberg's bumptious, large-scale oil on canvas abstraction, "Big Splash;" and Maryann Steinert-Foley's life-sized ceramic nude of a somnolent, archetypal woman, improbably titled "Rocket Dawg."

Carnwath included a number of strong abstract paintings, but little in the way of representational painting, save for Mimi Jensen's meticulously rendered still-life paintings that bear a slight resemblance to Michael Tompkins' shelf still lifes though they are, in comparison, flamboyantly romantic and theatrical.