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## ART

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**D**avis is a city of contradictions. Especially if you're driving a car. The Davis street system, set up to accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists, is difficult for the day-tripper to decipher. Parking can be a problem, too, and once the car is parked, you may find yourself dodging aggressive bicyclists. To make matters worse, the luscious piece of chocolate cake you buy to soothe your jangled nerves is likely to be crawling with zucchini or some other hidden healthful ingredient designed to prevent you from lapsing completely into a state of self-indulgent culinary sin.

In spite of all that, a trip to Davis is a must for art lovers this month. As Sacramentans who follow the Northern California scene know, there's more across the causeway than Birkenstocks, bean sprouts and bicycles. Davis also has art with a capital A.

This month's offerings include a museum-quality show of prints and drawings at the Natsoulas/Novelozo Gallery by 17 Bay area artists, many of them members of the faculty at the University of California, Davis, and a look at the university's current crop of MFA candidates at five galleries, both on and off campus. The UCD Art Department, studded with distinguished faculty, has consistently produced some of the most impressive young artists in the country, and its graduate program, along with Yale University's, is recognized as one of the nation's best.

This year's group of graduates compares favorably with its predecessors. Each of the 11 presents strong, resolved work. Some, as graduates often do, for heavy-handed, pedantic, high seriousness (and in the process sometimes make mountains out of molehills), their approaches are refreshingly diverse.

A group show of small works at the Pence Gallery in downtown Davis illustrates that diversity and serves as a sampler, though a somewhat deceptive one, of the rest of the exhibits. It offers a chance to make comparisons, discern influences, and get a feeling for the students as a group. What comes across here is a somber, almost unrelentingly earnest gravity (not much humor, not much color) and an underlying anxiety, reflected in a strong concern for social issues in some of the work. Beyond that, one can detect in various students the influences of faculty members Bob Arneson, Manuel Nieto, Lucy Puls and Cornelia Schulz.

**W**hat's deceptive about the show is that the drawings and studies of some of the artists, particularly sculptors Amy Podmore, Frank Pontecorvo and Bill Hill, do not come off well. Podmore's brooding, overworked, muddy drawings, for example, fail to prepare you for the strength of her sculptures on view at the Nelson Gallery on campus. If this group has a star, it's Podmore, whose slightly under-life-sized figures pack a powerful emotional punch. Both "Vigil," a folded-up figure hanging as in a web from wire cables attached to the walls in a corner of the gallery, and "Standing Figure," a charred tree spirit, speak of painful transformations of the flesh, as do all of Podmore's imaginative, strongly sculpted works.

Not do Russ Hepworth's muted photo-collages at Pence reflect the complexity and tastiness of his larger works at the Nelson. "Not a Pretty Picture," a silver print with mixed media, offers an asymmetric, metallic, abstracted landscape with a blue window, a staking ship



Amy Podmore's "Vigil," a folded-up figure hanging from wire cables.

## Students and masters

### Davis faculty, pupils shine alike in galaxy of shows

and this is because it is on a bold, gray sea. The whole is framed ironically with red velvet. Like much of his work, it manages to be humorous and haunting, brash and beautiful at the same time.

On the other hand, Cathy Stone's small works, fragmentary echoes of her elegant, evocative work and mixed-media installations at the Gorman Museum on campus, come off even better than her large pieces. The same is true of Richard Whitten's small paintings. They are looser and more intense than his large, illusionistic abstractions at Shackelford and Sears.

As for the rest, Eve Aschelm's unpretentious, searching drawings echo the seriousness and integrity of her very accomplished geometric abstracts at the Nelson. Ronnie Barron's funky assemblages of kitschy pottery smashed into pillars and blocks at the Memorial Union Gallery on campus are echoed by a small wall piece at Pence. And L.G. Williams, whose work is also at the M.U., offers a miniature version of his mysterious minimalist perspective drawings of black rooms that recede infinitely into smaller versions of themselves.

**"17** Bay Area Masters" at Natsoulas/Novelozo, the Sacramento-Davis area's newest and brightest gallery, offers top-notch works on paper by familiar Davis faculty — Arneson, DeForest, Petersen, Neri, Talebas and Wiley — as well as eminent Bay area artists Joan Brown, Jay De Feo, Hassell Smith and Peter Voulikos, whose works are less frequently shown in the Valley. Natsoulas has gathered exceptionally good examples of their works, and the result is one of the finest group shows I've seen in recent years.

Every piece in this show is a winner, but I was especially delighted by the contrast in this show between a sharp-edged, comic sensibility — Jeremy Anderson's, funk-surreal maps, Arneson's outrageous "General Nuke" and Clayton Bailey's blueprint for "Robog," a mechanical monster made of found objects that chases unwanted pests from the garden (accompanied by a working model that hums, lights up and moves — and a



"Not a Pretty Picture," by Russell Hepworth, silver print with mixed media.

sense of the sublime — Hassell Smith's bold, yet beautifully balanced, abstract brush drawings, for example, and a trio of remarkably beautiful, light-infused and resonant collages by Cornelia Schulz.

**UC DAVIS MFA EXHIBITS** will continue through July 2 at the C. N. Gorman Museum (T.B. 111, UC Davis campus, Monday through Friday from 1 to 5 p.m. and by appointment. For information: 752-6567); Memorial Union Art Museum (second floor of the union building, UC Davis, Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday from 2 to 6 p.m. and by appointment, 752-2885); the Richard Nelson Gallery (124 Art Building, UC Davis, Monday through Friday from noon to 5 p.m., Sunday from 2 to 5 p.m., and by appointment, 752-8500); Shackelford & Sears (213 F St., Davis, Thursday through Saturday from noon to 4 p.m., and by appointment, 756-6006); and Pence (212 D St., Davis, Tuesday through Saturday from noon to 4 p.m. and by appointment, 756-3370.) For general information: 752-8500.

**17 BAY AREA MASTERS** is at Natsoulas/Novelozo, 212 F St. Davis, through July 10. Open Tuesday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday from noon to 5 p.m. For information: 756-3938.