

PREVIEWART

Walnut Creek's Bedford Gallery honors local artistic voices

JUST IN CASE the Bay Area arts community still thinks of Contra Costa County as a cultural backwater, the Bedford Gallery in Walnut Creek has created another remarkable survey exhibit, "Local Voice: Defining Community Through Art."

This is the second show (the first was in 2005) that opens the gallery doors to anyone who lives or works in Contra Costa County, then subjects all the entries to professional judging. This year the juror was Phil Linhares, chief art curator at the Oakland Museum. He considered 661 entries before making the final choice of 186 to exhibit.

It's a wide-ranging show, a cornucopia of art including paintings both abstract and representational, watercolors, drawings, collages, constructions, images printed on glass, and sculpture ranging from traditional clay to silkscreened paper. One artist even made felt from scratch before dyeing and cutting it into shape.

There are many colorful, delightful works among the nearly 200 on display, giving a pleasant glimpse of local artists' work for patrons on their way to Leshar Center performances upstairs. Taken as a whole, though, the exhibit shows that Contra Costa artists deserve serious consideration.

"I was impressed by the depth and breadth of art that was submitted," Linhares says in a statement posted at the entrance. "The show is an astounding testament to the passion for and engagement in the visual arts here in Contra Costa County."

Many of the most intriguing works mix media, overlap images, combine text with photographs and painting — suggesting that the anxiety and fragmentation of the "outside" world affects artists as much as anyone. For some people, art is a refuge from life. For others, art is life.

Even traditional subjects can have an edge. Robert Gonsowski's "Autumn Table"



BEDFORD GALLERY

ROBERT GONSOWSKI, "Autumn Table," in the exhibit "Local Voice," June 29-Aug. 31, Bedford Gallery.



ROBERT TAYLOR
In the Galleries

is an almost jolting still life of squash, two of them sliced in half to reveal fat seeds, with a couple of turnips added to the mix. Timothy Clare's "Satisfaction" looks like a 19th century quilt or an old-fashioned theater curtain crammed with advertising. But it's created

from images on tin, painstakingly cut and assembled with brass nails.

Artists display an amazing variety of material this year. Among the stunning works is Reiko Fujii's life-size "Glass Ancestral Kimono," with photographs of Asians printed onto thick glass panels, then assembled like a mosaic, joined together by copper wire.

Another unusual work which feels very personal is Susan Fuller's "Sewing Club," which combines a photograph of a group of women, from the 1930s or '40s, with a hexagonal box filled with vintage spools of thread. The spool ends are printed with such homey legends as "mercerized," "bel-waxed" and "fast to boiling."

IF YOU GO

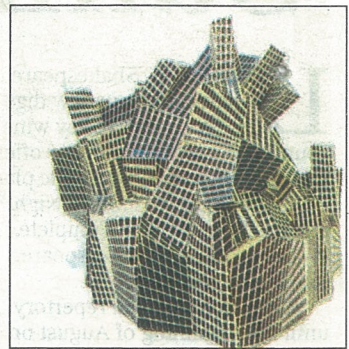
BEDFORD GALLERY: "Local Voice: Defining Community Through Art," through Aug. 31, noon-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Sundays, 6-8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays and during performances in the Leshar Center for the Arts, Civic Drive at Locust Street, Walnut Creek, \$2-\$3, 925-295-1417, www.bedfordgallery.org

Shari Arai De Boer's photo-etching, "Transient Rooms," is another mixed-media work with the resonance of history. It combines an old receipt for the Camellia City Nursery in Sacramento with a photograph of two Asian girls outside a dreary-looking hotel, standing next to a sign

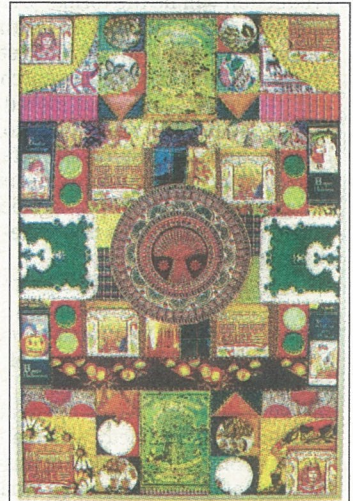
promoting "hot and cold water" and "steam heat." Another image suggests the barracks of World War II relocation camps.

On a lighter note, Cynthia Lait's acrylic "Party Mixer" includes a sketch of a sophisticated 1960s fashion image over blocks of color. The festive atmosphere is both highlighted and dimmed by a checklist for party etiquette inspired by period magazines, among them "Compliment the hostess." "One drink per hour."

Laura Kamian's "Armenian Alphabet," which was displayed earlier at Oakland's Swarm Gallery, has immediate punch, with its brightly colored individual letters, pinned to the gallery's white wall. But



VERDA ALEXANDER, "Berg," silkscreen on paper with tape.



TIMOTHY CLARE, "Satisfaction," tin and brass nails.

it's also mysterious — Kamian learned this ancient-looking alphabet, and she also hand-made the merino wool felt, then cut out the letters.

The exhibit's sculpture runs the gamut of inspiration and material, from fanciful ceramics to Verda Alexander dizzying construction of silkscreened paper, assembled with tape. It's a kind of cityscape that recalls distorted skylines of German expressionist films and old Hollywood musicals. But with the buildings' grids collapsing on themselves, it might just as well be called "mortgage meltdown."

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