

BIENNIAL SOUTHWEST

THE ALBUQUERQUE MUSEUM
2000 MOUNTAIN ROAD NW, ALBUQUERQUE

Juried Exhibition: Artists are invited to submit from Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, to be juried by Neal Benezra, the Director of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. The call went out with the offer of cash rewards, and the good doctor whittled over a thousand objects by five hundred fifty artists down to the one hundred-three on the walls. The cost to each artist to submit was fifty dollars, so I think we know where those cash awards are coming from. But then the Museum's gotta keep the lights on, right?

Highlights: Terence I. Baggett's *Rhythm in Motion*, in which a continuous thin ribbon of porcelain almost describes a spherical ovoid, but instead keeps moving; displayed back in a niche that made it frustratingly hard to move around. Has the flat-screen TV warped our curator's sense of the phenomenology of space? The sculpture is a pure aesthetic pleasure nonetheless, suggesting a cosmic trance dance of elegant standing wave symmetry. Nice.

Fernando Delgado presents a sumptuous photographic image in a tight focus shot that recalls Weston, with a vulvic twist that would make Ms. O'Keeffe blush. His photograph is lovely, classical, and sexy.

Jessica Drenk stuffed two box frames with rolls of toilet paper—ends out—to create a network of squished or open ovoids (what's with the cosmic ovoid again?). She then singed the surface in areas and called the piece *Nucleus Universe*. The singeing suggests (gasp) shit stains and makes the toilet paper elegantly repellent. The Deleuzian white wall/black hole polarity is semi-collapsed here. In Deleuze-speak, the white wall is the face of high culture and the entropic black hole is identified with Satan's goat-like asshole. Is Drenk suggesting that art is today being used to wipe the ass of the devil? In many ways she'd be correct.

Justin Lane's color photographs document his architectural installations and play intriguing games with space, confinement, and the illusion of escape. Actually, a number of excellent entries come from the realm of staged photography. Sheilah Wilson's "performed photographs" are profoundly simple concepts that hover on the edge between dry humor and a poignancy that verges on tears. Her Duratrans lightbox, entitled *Untitled III (Flight)*, backlights a beautiful image of the artist flat on her back in a desert landscape staring up at the sky while grasping a bunch of colorful helium balloons. Is she waiting for a bodily lift-off that will never come, or, more optimistically, is she traveling far and wide in her own mind? *Untitled VII (Flight)* is a C-print by the same artist in which we see her balanced on one end of a sawhorse releasing a piece of crumpled paper into the wind of a stormy sky. Letting go of all sorts of burdensome paperwork and its contingent bureaucracies is implied, along with the tragic-comic sense that this "heroic" act will again prove insufficient. Her *Flight* series hinges on the increasing disconnect between our longing for freedom and the inherent cultural confinements of the body and soul in contemporary society.

In another staged photograph, and in a similar vein, Pat Berrett presents the bare back of a young woman (the artist?) covered with handwritten words in the first person describing a memory of being four years old, when her only ambition was to see how far she could spit cherry pits across the street in front of her house. Here we have the nostalgic longing for a time—childhood—when the body's volitions remained unchecked. The idea that our memories are written on the body is literalized, and the struggle between grown-up existence and societal discontent is made perfectly clear.

Erika Osborne also continues the time-honored tradition of turning away from the viewer. Her life-size portraits present barebacked figures standing before maps. The portions of the maps blocked by their bodies are meticulously redrawn on their skin, raising questions about the body in space, how we carry our sense of place, and obliquely suggesting that we need to become one with the land.

Jesse Billimack is one with the sand. His asymmetrical sand drawing on the floor suggests the mandala traditions of Tibetan ceremony and Native American sand painting, but with a neutral palette and degree of abstraction that recalls Hans Arp or Miró, and is also reminiscent of cartography.

Painting fares a little less well in this show, though there is a strong post-pop picture by Tim Jag, and Joyce Shupe's *Velare* zings with color, representing a nice synthesis between stripe painting and dripping paint. *Killer* by William Betts mines the overlaps among pixelated digital imagery, surveillance systems, and acrylic pointillism in a way that is moody and ominous and simultaneously technically demanding.

Overall, the show held many strong pieces but few amazing surprises.



Sheilah Wilson, *Untitled III (Flight)*, Duratrans lightbox, 36" x 52", nd