

Woodard, Josef. "Eyeing mastery." Santa Barbara News-Press. 3 July 2009.

SANTA BARBARA
CONTEMPORARY ARTS FORUM

Eyeing mastery

By Josef Woodard
NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

Time and again, some of the more provocative and inherently surprising art produced in Santa Barbara arrives in the fleeting, sneeze-you-missed-it form of the annual UCSB MFA exhibitions at school year's end. Those surprise factors involve both the idiosyncratic, conceptual fizz of the work and the sequestered nature of the students' brainchildren. Work is done behind closed doors and polished in studios and classrooms, and suddenly, poof, the MFA show flings the work into the public face and interface.

And in terms of that all-important public interface, circumstances take a fresh turn this year.

The show has settled down for a full month-and-change in the legitimate downtown contemporary art haven of Contemporary Arts Forum. Perhaps partly just by atmospheric association, the CAF's housing confers a fresh and deeper spirit of seriousness on the artistic inhabitants. With an enigmatic title borrowed from a book by Jorge Luis Borges, "Dreamtigers" was organized by director Miki Garcia and UCSB Art Professor Jane Callister (who has had impressive showings in CAF herself).

Just as Borges' book culls a diversity of short pieces, the exhibition plays like a cohesive assembly of disparate but compatible artistic personae, more so than it has in past MFA shows.

Various degrees of finish govern the varied art here, from Elizabeth Folk's slick ersatz restaurant game piece to Carrie Maseredjian's unabashedly and appealingly messy "All of My Love, For You Now." A ragtag assembly of sentimentally loaded objects — including a kick drum pedal, cement-filled rain boots and that relic known as the cassette tape — are strewn about the gallery floor and walls, somewhere between casually and carefully. Her installation finds its expressive strength in the gap between chaos and order.

In Folk's playful interactive installation, called "Just Play! Restaurant," three loudly colored restaurant nooks are tended to by a live waitress/artwork activator. Rolls of jumbo dice determine the playful dinging experience of visitors, who are led to one of the nooks, and are granted the dramatic fates spelled out in large block-letter signs: "Bad Waitress," "It's Your Birthday," or "Boss Me."

Aside from the clever artistic elements marshaled into the game-like situation, Folk's work also makes a sly reference to the

reality that MFA artists spend at least some time in the wait-person business.

Another real-time, real-artist presence can be found, daily, in Nathan Hayden's corner of CAF, close to the entrance. For the intrinsic and non-linear work-in-progress he calls "We Will All Be a Little Bit Special," Hayden sits at a desk building on his collection of tiny image-and-text pieces on tiny paper scraps, later randomly tacked onto an increasingly dense gallery wall.

Tucked back in a small back gallery, Alejandro Casazi's "Ematheia Ballare" creates its own distinct and self-enclosed ambience, cut off from the general flow and shared space of the other artists in the show. In the room, large inflatable balls are suspended like radiant orbs from the ceiling, and are equipped with projecting floral-like patterns issuing murmuring sonic textures. Visitors are

invited to touch the art — embrace it, in fact, so that the orbs can respond to the specific heartbeats and body temperatures of the art-watchers/huggers.

In Calico Brown's region of the gallery, matters of medium are less important than connected impressions and suggestions. Photographs of a deceptively casual and funky nature seem to elevate banality, including images of an Egyptian-themed restaurant, a weirdly mystical shot of rubbish — filled Hefty bags and a disarmingly lovely image of a funky chair viewed through a window.

In the back gallery, Brown projects slo-mo black and white film footage of a flood flowing through palm trees, next to a sculpture of a large white snake — a serpent on loan from the book of Genesis? — writhing around a branch. Through it all, we get a certain sense of paradise slipping away from innocence.

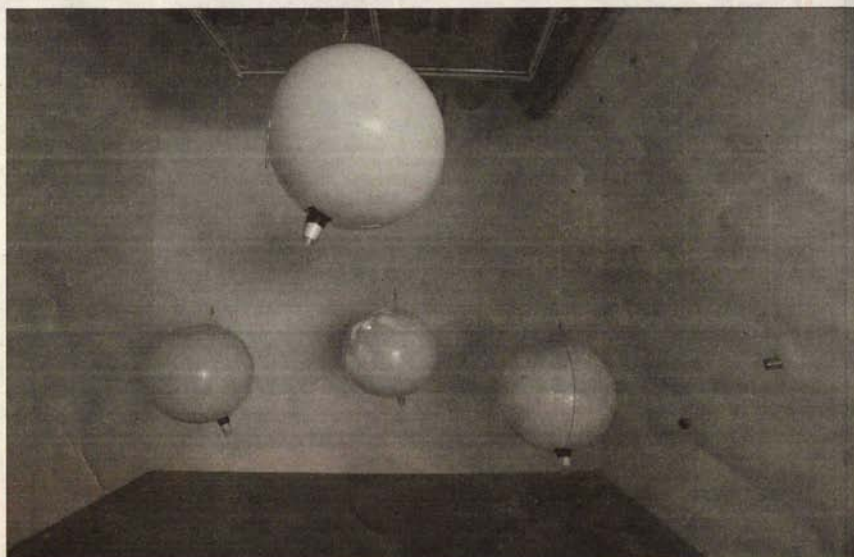
As a separate but University-connected side exhibition, the typical "Bloom Projects" corner of CAF — dedicated to emerging artists in installation art mode — goes to UCSB alumnae Stephanie Mansolf and Kat Trajano. As others have before in this space, the pair has cleverly concocted a room-within-the-corner, cheekily titled "Acid Lovechild." The mating in question could have to do with the canny blend of cultural touchstones.

In this romper room of references, Victorian Era wallpaper design meets gaudy post-'60s kitsch and a recurring motif of cuddly stuffed creatures, vaguely resembling fetuses. We are torn between feelings of coziness and emotional toxicity, a paradox of the elephant-in-the-room variety. ■

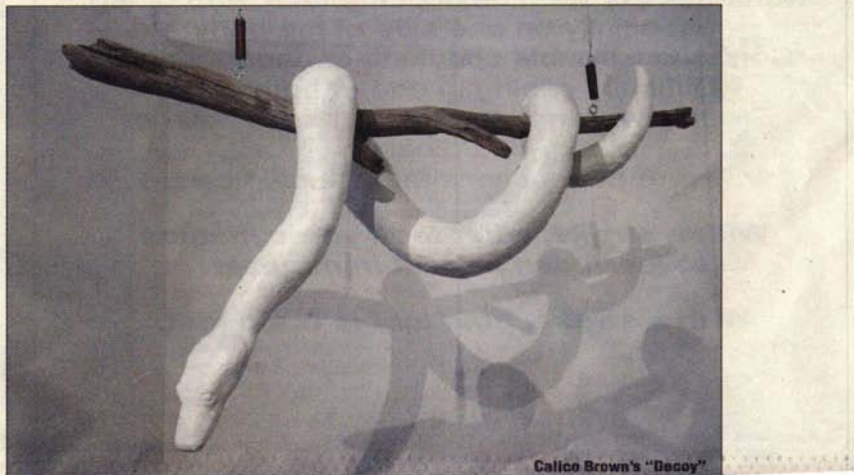
This year's exhibition of work by UCSB MFA students is an intriguing and installation-heavy show at CAF



Elizabeth Folk's "Just Play! Restaurant"



Alejandro Casazi's "Ematheia Ballare"



Calico Brown's "Decoy"

ART REVIEW

'DREAMTIGERS: UCSB MFA EXHIBITION'

When: through July 10
Where: Contemporary Arts Forum, 653 Paseo Nuevo
Hours: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday, noon to 5 p.m., Sunday
Information: 966-5373, www.sbcaf.org



SANTA BARBARA
CONTEMPORARY ARTS FORUM

Contemporary Arts Forum **Dreamtigers**

By ERIN J. SMITH / CASA

A GIFTED GROUP OF EMERGING ARTISTS GRADUATE TO THE NEXT LEVEL when their collective MFA exhibition *Dreamtigers* opens at Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum June 6th.

"We are delighted to spotlight these emerging artists," said Miki Garcia, CAF Executive Director, who co-curated the exhibition with Jane Callister, the Graduate Committee Chair for UCSB's Department of Art. "One of CAF's core missions is to highlight the array of new creative activity in our area."

The five artists included in the show are graduating MFA students from UCSB's Department of Art: Calico Brown, Alejandro Casazi, Elizabeth Folk, Nathan Hayden, and Carrie Maseredjian.

Although the first of its kind to be held

at CAF, the collaboration came about by happy accident. UCSB's University Art Museum is currently undergoing a retrofit, leaving this year's graduating class without a gallery space to exhibit their artwork. CAF became an obvious choice, thus bridging the academy and the community. As a result, the artists have experienced a rare opportunity to learn first hand all it takes to put on an exhibition as professional artists. "We treated the exhibition like any other, with studio visits and long conversations about the space," said Garcia. "It's been a wonderful



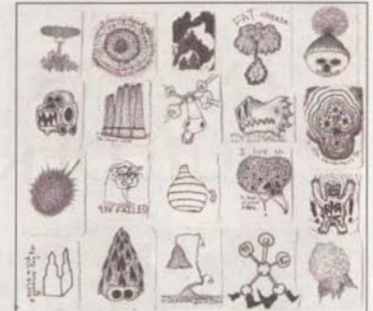
Empatheia Ballare, 2009, mixed media installation by **Alejandro Casazi**

experiment."

The exhibition offers a range of artistic practices and mediums from video, photography, and performance art to sculpture and book art. The curators found inspiration for the title from Jorge Luis Borges' book *Dreamtigers*, a collection of memoirs told through poems, parables, and short stories. Taken separately, the parts of Borges' book wouldn't seem to go together. But read together, the book embodies all that Borges is. "One of the challenges of curating a show like this is that each artist has a different voice," said Garcia. "That is the reason for the title.

The exhibition as a whole showcases the emerging practices in the contemporary arts right now."

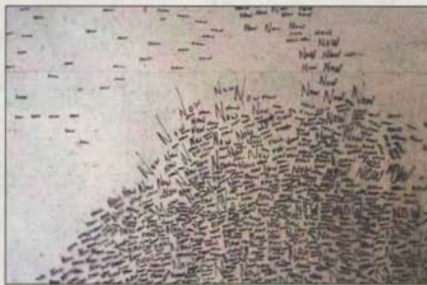
On Saturday, June 6th, a special walkthrough



The Cards, 2008-2009, pen and ink on paper by **Nathan Hayden**

with the artists and curators is available to CAF members from 5 to 6pm followed by a reception open to the public from 6 to 8pm. The artwork will be on exhibit through July 10th.

CAF is located at 653 Paseo Nuevo. Hours are 11am to 5pm, Tuesday through Saturday, and noon to 5pm on Sunday, Mon through Sun. For more information, call 966-5373 or visit www.sbcaf.org.



Trail of Now (Front Door Affirmations), 2008, floor drawings by **Carrie Maseredjian**



Water Finds Its Own Level, 2009, digital video with sound by **Calico Brown**



Just Play! Money, ©2009, official tender of Just Play! Board Games, Inc., by **Elizabeth Folk**

Smith, Erin J. "Contemporary Arts Forum Dreamtigers."
Casa Magazine. 5 June 2009.