

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

JULY 19-25, 2019

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SEBASTIAN MANISCALCO
SAYS HIS KEY TO SUCCESS
IS HIS WORK ETHIC.

Story by Nick Masinfat. Pages 8-9



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THREE FREE EXHIBITS OPEN AT UCSB ART, DESIGN & ARCHITECTURE MUSEUM, FEATURING LEE MULLICAN, MARY HEEBNER, JEFF SHELTON AND ROBERT BENAVIDEZ

By Josh Gregg,
News-Press Staff Writer

The three new exhibits now open at UCSB's Art, Design & Architecture Museum will share an opening reception on July 26, despite at first glance having nothing in common. From drawings, to architectural sketches, to Greek and Roman themed collages, to fancy pinatas, the contents of the exhibits that opened on Saturday don't scream cohesion or immediately hint at a unifying theme.

However, according to acting museum director Elyse Gonzales, where "Lee Mulligan: Drawings," "The Muse Project: Mary Heebner and Jeff Shelton," and "Robert Benavidez: Pinatas of Earthly Delights" share common ground is how their featured artists drew from the past to create their works.

"All the artists on view in these exhibitions have been deeply influenced by historical antecedents and overtly refer to them in their finished works," she stated in a press release. 14 drawings by the late Lee Mulligan, the only deceased artist featured in the exhibition, display his surrealist technique of automatism. Largely inspired by his experience working as a military cartographer in World War II, Mulligan's technique also draws from abstract expressionism, Zen Buddhism, and Native American art to produce what the museum describes as "a flurry of expressive marks and suggestive imagery, alternating between chaotic and serene."

Pieces by local artist Mary Heebner and architect Jeff Shelton, the eponymous individuals in "The Muse Project," explore "the outcomes of art and architecture's cross-pollination." Ms. Heebner chose works from the museum's architectural collection to display alongside her collages of Greek and Roman statues, which appear in wall pieces like her "Veiled/Unveiled" series and in books that also contain light-sensitive, watermarked art.

When the News-Press stopped by her Haley St. art studio on Tuesday afternoon, Ms. Heebner showed her creative process, which begins with photographing the faces of antique statues at museums. She then flips the images to get different perspectives and alters them in unique ways like graphite shading or adding marbled paper, after which she puts them together in a collage. "I'm taking these canonical images and breaking them apart, disrupting them, fracturing them open to see different aspects of the human face," she said.

For the architectural plans sitting in comparison with her collages, the artist chose works by Brazilian architects Oscar Niemeyer and Roberto Burle Marx, whose architectural plans she said were essentially acetate collages.

"They were layering shapes and that seemed to me in one sense what I do. I'm layering shapes to create a composition," she said.

In a reversal of the artist choosing archi-



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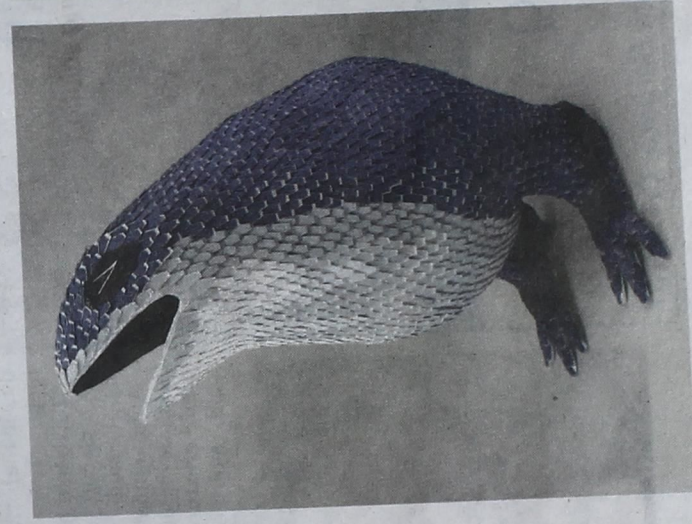
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tectural pieces to go with her work, the exhibit's other half features that of local architect Jeff Shelton paired alongside selections from the museum's fine art collection. Chosen by Mr. Shelton himself, these include a sculpture by Claes Oldenburg and pottery by Beatrice Wood.

Mr. Shelton's own creations are represented by architectural sketches, models, and furniture created during the process of building construction. Among these is an early watercolor painting of Abilit Tower on Haley St., one of the many buildings the architect has constructed based on Mediterranean building traditions. Mr. Shelton told the News-Press that his half of "The Muse Project" looks not too different from his office, which he views as apt since the exhibit is meant to show the creative process, the means of how his buildings come to be.

"It's about the process of how we get here," he said.

The third exhibit "Piñatas of Earthly Delights" is named for the famed Hieronymus Bosch triptych oil painting "The Garden of Earthly Delights," a work that has long fascinated Los Angeles-based sculptor Roberto Benavidez. So much so, that the artist has created more than 20 life-size piñatas of creatures from the painting. Though some of the exhibit's piñatas are in the likeness of humans from the painting, most are of Bosch's take on animals. Mr. Benavidez told the News-Press that he is particularly captivated by the Dutch artists' animals due to their "formidable" look.

"I like that his creatures are both cute and disturbing," he said.

Animal piñatas featured in the show include a giraffe, a "weird creature in a handstand," a bird eating a frog,

and a cat eating a lizard. While working a corporate job in the greater Los Angeles area, Mr. Benavidez began honing his artistic skills by taking figure sculpting and metal casting classes at Pasadena City College. Once classes concluded, the materials needed to continue what he had learned on his own were too expensive and he was forced to find an alternative medium. After coming across a photo of an impressive piñata online, his imagination was ignited and he got to work on his first, leading to many more.

"It got richer and richer the more I worked on it, until blossomed into what it is now," he said.

Not only is it an affordable way to work, but Mr. Benavidez particularly enjoys elevating the art form to a level of esteem to which it is not commonly held.

"I find the piñata an interesting form because most people don't view it as a fine art but as a craft, and a very disposable one at that," he said.

Mr. Benavidez expressed excitement about "Piñatas of Earthly Delights," which is his first solo art show. Though he's not sure how the public will react to his creations, it's not something he gives much thought. Instead, he prefers to focus on the next piñata.

"Any time my mind goes in that direction, I try to think about my next project and get to work," he said.

Admission to "Roberto Benavidez: Piñatas of Earthly Delights," "The Muse Project: Mary Heebner and Jeff Shelton," and "Lee Mullican: Drawings" is free and the exhibits will continue at the museum until September 1. An opening reception for the three exhibitions will be held at the museum on July 26 from 5:30 to 7 p.m. The Art, Design & Architecture Museum is located at 552 University Rd. and open from Wednesday to Sunday from noon to 5 p.m.

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