

Working with Spaces, Real and Imagined

IN 'ALMOST ANYTHING GOES: ARCHITECTURE AND INCLUSIVITY'
SEVERAL INNOVATIVE, LOS-ANGELES-BASED FIRMS EXTEND IDEAS
INTO THE REALM OF INSTALLATION AND GALLERY-FRIENDLY WORKS

By Josef Woodard, News-Press Correspondent



'Almost Anything Goes: Architecture and Inclusivity'

When: through April 13

Where: Museum of Contemporary Art,
653 Paseo Nuevo

Hours: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday through
Saturday,

11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursday, noon to 5 p.m. Sunday

Information: 966-5373, mcasantabarbara.org

Concrete clouds may be our first indication that the architectural angles in the show called "Almost Anything Goes: Architecture and Inclusivity" are anything but straight or conventional. Perched on the floor and "floating" from the ceiling of the Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara is the piece collectively known, jestingly and knowingly, as "Heavy," by the firm known as Design Bitches, partnered by Catherine Johnson and Rebecca Rudolph.

Cartoony, cloudlike shapes made of concrete dot the floor space, and literal bags of this staple material of the architect's trade are suspended overhead, as if unwieldy surrogates for a cloudscape. Aside from the immediate post-modern gag at work here — a giddy playing up of opposites — "Heavy" neatly typifies the general lay of the exhibition's concept and framework, a playground for architects thinking outside their usual box, invited to bring new ideas into the art gallery context.

Santa Barbara's art scene has done fairly well with architecture exhibitions, courtesy of UCSB's longstanding, renowned architectural archives, even inspiring a recent change in the museum's moniker to the Art, Design and Architecture Museum. But whereas architecture exhibitions there tend to focus on actual work "in the field" rather than in the gallery context, the work in the aptly-named "Almost Anything Goes: Architecture and Inclusivity," curated by Miki Garcia and Brigitte Kouo, comes from an entirely different place, with site-specific, and gallery-minded conceptions by innovative young architecture firms out of Los Angeles.

Their not-necessarily-ready-for-standard-usage-or-application notions go left and right, mixing the actual and the suggested, the digitally-enhanced and the, well, "concrete." Close to the gallery entrance, Atelier Manferdini (Elena Manferdini) shows curvy, kitschy, low tables, under the title "Eye Candy," festooned with bright, abstracted imagery of candy, and from a more understated place, DO/SU Studio Architecture (Doris Sung) uses software to create totemic sculptural forms of radically differing scale and convex sides.

If the Manferdini art artifacts double as domestically usable elements/objects of design, that multi-use conundrum increases in the case of the work by Ball-Nogues Studio (Benjamin Ball and Gaston Nogues). Nestled in their own sensuously darkened corner space in the gallery is a small gathering of their "creatures," amorphous and biomorphic blobs made of paper pulp, fluorescent bulbs and hardware, illuminated from within and coyly embracing a multiple identity, which includes sculpture, alternative lamp works and subversive design items.

Tucked away in his own pseudo-office space in a small gallery, Miles Kemp, from Variate Labs, nicely occupies the virtual reality niche of the show with "A Sense of Place in Digital Design" — with an emphasis on the "sense" of place. Mr. Kemp combines architectural history homage with contemporary computer-centric machinery by allowing viewers to don the goggles and take a self-guided (via keyboard controls) virtual tour of rendering of Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye. It's not like being there, but the "there there" is an entity unto itself.

Meanwhile, in the self-contained space that is the Norton Gallery, the idea of presence versus absence informs the odd, minimalist concept presented by Amorphis L.A. (Ramiro Diaz-Granados), in the form of "If looks could kill, I am dead now." Altering perception of space and also gallery consciousness, the piece involves four rectangular, but slightly diagonal-pitched, steel-framing structures, like doorways gone askew or armatures



SteveMalone/News Press photo:

'Heavy,' Design, Bitches



'Radiant Body Glob Lamps,' Ball-Nogues Studio



'Eye Candy,' Atelier Manferdini

for scroll-like white material we somehow expect to host two-dimensional markings or meanings.

But no: the Amorphis ploy is to maneuver a bit of installation think mixed up with architectural mind play, evoking an unfinished means to an intentionally unstated aesthetic and architectural end. Intriguing as it baffles and teases our senses of place and function, in the final rub, to coin a phrase, it is what it is. Almost anything, after all, goes here, and the results tickle our sensibilities in some fresh ways.



'Exo,' DO/SO Studio Architecture