

# States of the art

## MCA SB'S CALL FOR ENTRIES SHOW FOCUSES ON INTERACTIVITY AND ABSTRACTION

By Ted Mills,  
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### "Out of the Great Wide Open"

**When:** Through March 29

**Where:** MCA Santa Barbara, Paseo Nuevo Mall

**Gallery hours:** 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Wednesday, Friday, Saturday;

11 a.m.-8 p.m. Thursday; 12-5 p.m. Sunday

**Cost:** Free

**Information:** 966-5373, mcasantabarbara.org

**M**CA's annual Call for Entries intends to be a query on the state of art, 2015, in the tri-county area, a chance to honor a series of artists both new and experienced who are catching that special something in their nets and pushing art forward. There's a lot of do-it-yourself in the show that's been dubbed "Out of the Great Wide Open." There are artists who want their art to be crowdsourced by the crowd, or to be manipulated, built and torn down. But not all in this show are tweaking the audience's reaction so directly. Others in this exhibition that opened Saturday (and runs through March 29) still present canvases, but are pushing representation and non-representational art into new realms. There's plenty to explore, and much excitement to be had.

MCA SB wants attendees to know that the exhibition's artists come from places far and wide and have devoted a back wall in the museum's educational area to their locations. (It's a pretty cool map of the Central Coast — check it!). There's space for the northerner Nick Wilkinson, who works in Los Osos and Erik ReeL, who lives in Ventura, and everybody else in between.

Visitors will be met by two large works at the museum's entry. To the left is "No Sinking New Ships," Cathy Ellis' acrylic painting of a luxury car sinking grill-first into a lake or wetland, with a bloodshot sunset sky behind. The Goleta-by-way-of-Virginia artist likes to crash together the man-made and the natural worlds, leaving behind paintings that suggest a calm after the disaster.

Next to that is Ojai's Wendy Osher's interactive work "Don't Tread on Me," which has divided its wall space into a grid and asks people to copy one square each onto the wall until the entire picture gets created.



Photo courtesy Nick Wilkinson

"Hyerr," Nick Wilkinson

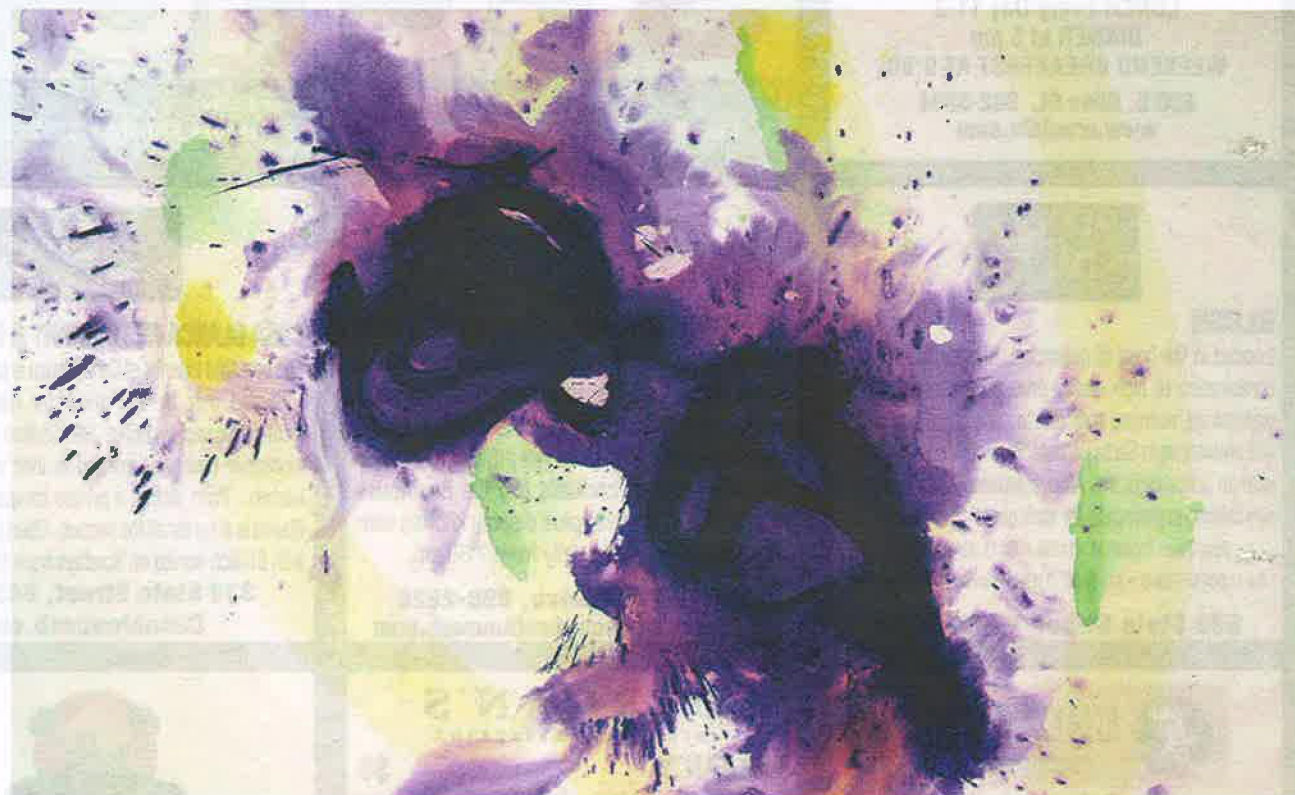


Photo courtesy Seyburn Zorthian

"Orchid Beat," Seyburn Zorthian

There's more interaction with Santa Barbara-based Ryan Bulis' "Bridge A to B," which offers a picnic table-like setting with a top filled with blocks and other sculptural elements. Mr. Bulis is curious who will want to create their own towers, alter what they find, or knock everything down. He's deliberately set it close to the educational area to further confuse the line between the artist's work and what the public can do.

As for the rest, abstract painting is popular this year. The far wall is taken up with Nick Wilkinson's series of wood-panel works, which chart his progress from piling up paint layers on the panels to letting the wood grain become an element in itself. Mr. Wilkinson combines hard lines — some torn, as if he's roughly pulling away layers — with the softness of spray paint. Regarded at a distance, his colorful canvases appear three-dimensional. His kinsman in the show is Erik ReeL, who has shown recently around town and has a whole side gallery devoted to his large canvases of watery colors from which the most basic of lines can be discerned — like wall scribbles that might be pre-alphabet — but that won't stop some viewers from trying to read into it all.

Seyburn Zorthian's acrylics defy what we know of the paint in her central work, "Orchid Beat," having the limpid quality of watercolor and action of ink. The influence of sumi-e and Chinese scroll painting is there in the technique, and apparently Solvang-based Ms. Zorthian uses large horse-hair brushes to get that recognizable Eastern texture. Sommer Roman's odd sculptures use dresses, other fabrics, toys, wood, door hinges and other detritus and with resin freezes these odd collections into works that look like they're either flying apart or coming together into a strange organism. There's a refusal of symmetry, anthropomorphism and beauty (well, for most people anyway), but there's plenty of humor.

MCA's show features other surprises, including Ms. Osher's video work and a separate exhibition in the Bloom Project gallery of Conrad

Ruiz, who pokes fun at commodified masculinity by painting either washboard abs or abstract, colorful close-ups of energy drinks in the act of being poured (sample titles "Strawberry Yeah Yeah II" and "Black Cherry Breezer").

The show has been open nearly a week, and that's a week's worth of interactions on the big wall and the wooden "play set." But it's not too late to take part. You have until the end of March.



Photo courtesy Sommer Roman

"Swing Leeward," Sommer Roman