

Space and Such is the Place

A GROUP SHOW AT INDIGO HOTEL, ORGANIZED BY MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART SANTA BARBARA, INVOLVES IDEAS AND IMAGES ON THE THEME OF SPACE

By Josef Woodard, News-Press Correspondent



'The Vastness is Bearable'

When: through December 7, 2014

Where: Hotel Indigo, 121 State St.

Information: 966-5373, mcasantabarbara.org

A year ago, the Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara – then known by its long-standing, previous moniker, Contemporary Arts Forum – took the adventurous and admirable move of stretching its tentacles out from the home-turf gallery in Paseo Nuevo, launching its “satellite” exhibition program in the halls of the agreeably hip, new Hotel Indigo. Fittingly, the inaugural show in this hotel, two blocks from the ocean, was “Limuw: An Ode to the Sea,” with ocean-related art and links to “Limuw,” the Chumash word for both the sea and yonder Santa Cruz Island, across the Santa Barbara channel.

For phase two in the satellite venture, this year’s model (up for most of 2014) heads out in to space, and thinking thereof, with the group show called “The Vastness is Bearable.” The show takes its title from a quote by astronomer to the stars and the people, Carl Sagan, addressing the intimidating magnitude of the universe. “For small creatures such as we, the vastness is bearable only through love.”

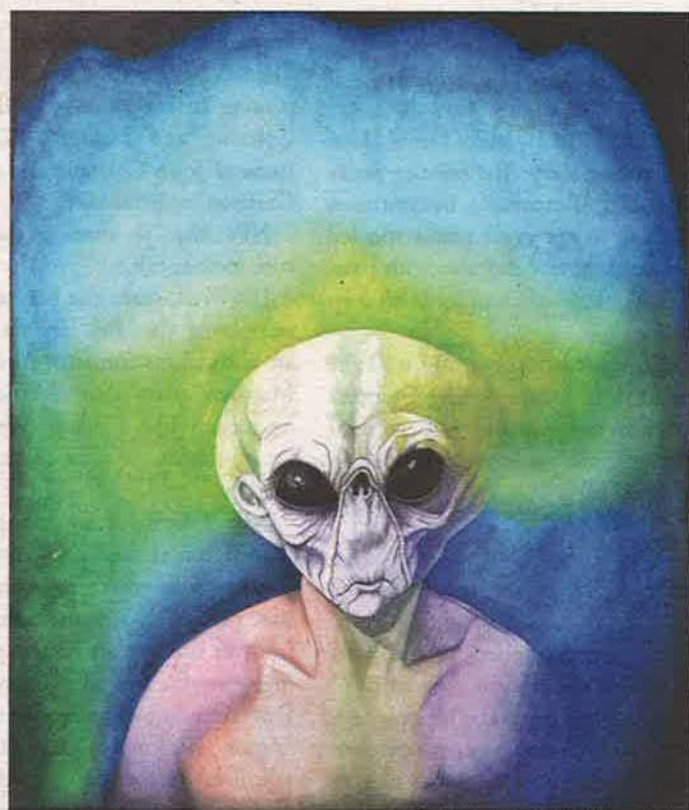
Space, of course, is a vast topic, literally and otherwise, but also pervasive and always local. We get that message from the first piece in the show, Russell Crotty’s “Nightfall, Gaviota Coast,” an ink and gouache on fiberglass sphere piece, which blends poetic text on a ball representing a celestial body. The art globe is suspended from the ceiling above the stairwell by the hotel entrance, which forces us to look upward. It’s an operative gesture for art watching in this particular context.

Up the stairs, in the lounge area lined with contemporary art books, we are again forced to turn our gaze heavenward-ish and crane our neck, to take in Cassandra C. Jones’ “Polaris.” Placed high on a wall, her set of overlapping images of night skies over urban and landscape settings, with kinetic constellations of points of light, evokes Van Gogh’s starry night vision and kaleidoscopic nocturnes.

Downstairs, Desirée Holman’s “Close Contact, Outer Space” is a hypnotic video piece, with slowly moving, cosmic debris and shifting relationships of celestial bodies seeming to express both a genuine awe for the wonder of the universe’s workings, and a half-ironic wink in the direction of New Age hokum and sci-fi imaginings. She also goes down a space-cased, pop-culture path with her “Channeling Aura,” series of presumably cuddly, ET portraits (hopefully, they’re cuddly, as in “ET,” versus the ornery buggers from “Mars Attacks”).

Mexico City-based artist Rafael Vargas-Suarez shows his “Vector Hardware Panel” pieces, enchanting circuit board-like abstractions, in the unusual and modernité media of oil enamel and solar cells on recycled aluminum, while Rodolfo Choperena, also from Mexico City, taps into a personalized, experimental photography approach. His piece from his “Interventions in Light” series, combine an original, long-exposure shot of the moon, Photoshopped to suggest a vaporous or almost amniotic life force. We’re inclined to read the image as a reference to inner or outer space, or both, a critical ambiguity in its artistic expression.

Back in the realm of the pop-cultured world, Berkeley-based artist of Iranian parentage, Ala Ebtekar shows “Timerider” and “Space Mission to the Lost,” which cleverly crosshatch the entertainment kitsch of B-movie posters – reversed and artfully obscured – and references to such ancient Persian poets as the 14th century master, Hāfez. Space, as a vehicle and springboard, is just one element in Mr. Ebtekar’s art, which synthesizes culture, high and low, and disparate historical epochs, conspiring to create a personal aesthetic across cultures. His is an aesthetic about seeking a personal voice amidst a bearable vastness.

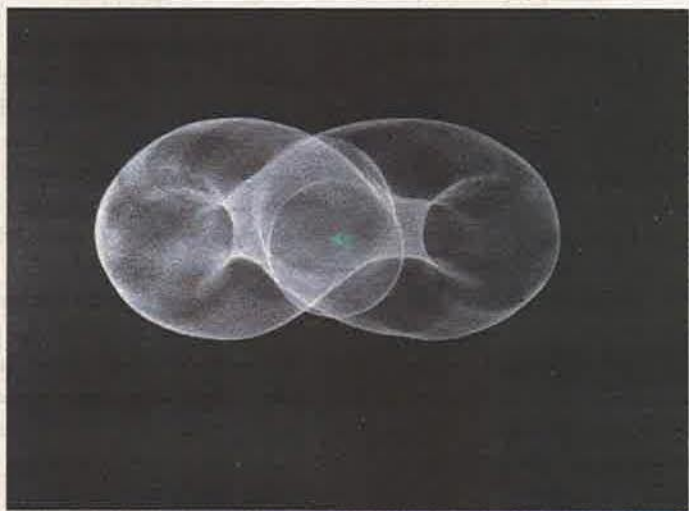


Steve Malone/News Press photos

'Channeling Aura 2, from the Sophot Series,' Desirée Holman



'Nightfall, Gaviota Coast,' Russell Crotty



'Interventions in Light,' Rodolfo Choperena