

# Parading on the Precipice

AT MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART SANTA BARBARA 'ASSUME VIVID ASTRO FOCUS: AVALANCHES VOLCANOES ASTEROIDS FLOODS' CREATES A FLAMBOYANT AND CARNIVAL-ESQUE ASSEMBLY OF IMAGE REFERENCES

By Josef Woodard,  
News-Press Correspondent



**'assume vivid astro focus:  
avalanches volcanoes asteroids  
floods'**

**When:** through December 31

**Where:** Museum of Contemporary Art Santa  
Barbara, 653 Paseo Nuevo

**Hours:** 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Wednesday, Friday  
Saturday; 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Thursday; 12-5 p.m.  
Sunday

**Information:** 966-5373, [mcasantabarbara.org](http://mcasantabarbara.org)



Wayne McCall photos

**assume vivid astro focus: avalanches volcanoes asteroids floods, 2016, Installation view at Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara, Commissioned by MCASB, Courtesy the Artists**

Over at the Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara this fall, before entering the flamboyant, thematically-loaded crazy quilt of an exhibition known as "avalanches volcanoes asteroids floods," by the NYC-based artist collective known as "assume vivid astro focus: avalanches volcanoes asteroids floods," shoes must come off. It's not proper to step on the art, after all, with street shoes, and art carpets the floors and covers the walls here, with video on the side (and in the sonic ambience of the Museum).

A welcome mat outside the gallery-within-the-gallery space hints at what is to be encountered inside. Logo-like simplicity in yellow and rust colors encompass the neatly-drawn image and words baked in potential calamity — "AVALANCHES, VOLCANOES, ASTEROIDS, FLOODS," with a cheery sense of balance and symmetry slyly counterbalancing ominous portents of a precarious world and the basic need for festive release. So it goes throughout the show, a duality of underlying dread



and the will-to-parade and party. Call it fiddling while Rome is in danger of burning.

Fittingly, the multi-pronged, multi-media, multi-intentioned collective "avaf" started in New York in 2001, by Eli Sudback, originally from Rio de

Janeiro, and French-born and Paris-based Christophe Hamade-Pierson, who joined the evolving, hard-to-describe effort in

**MCASB**

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## MCASB

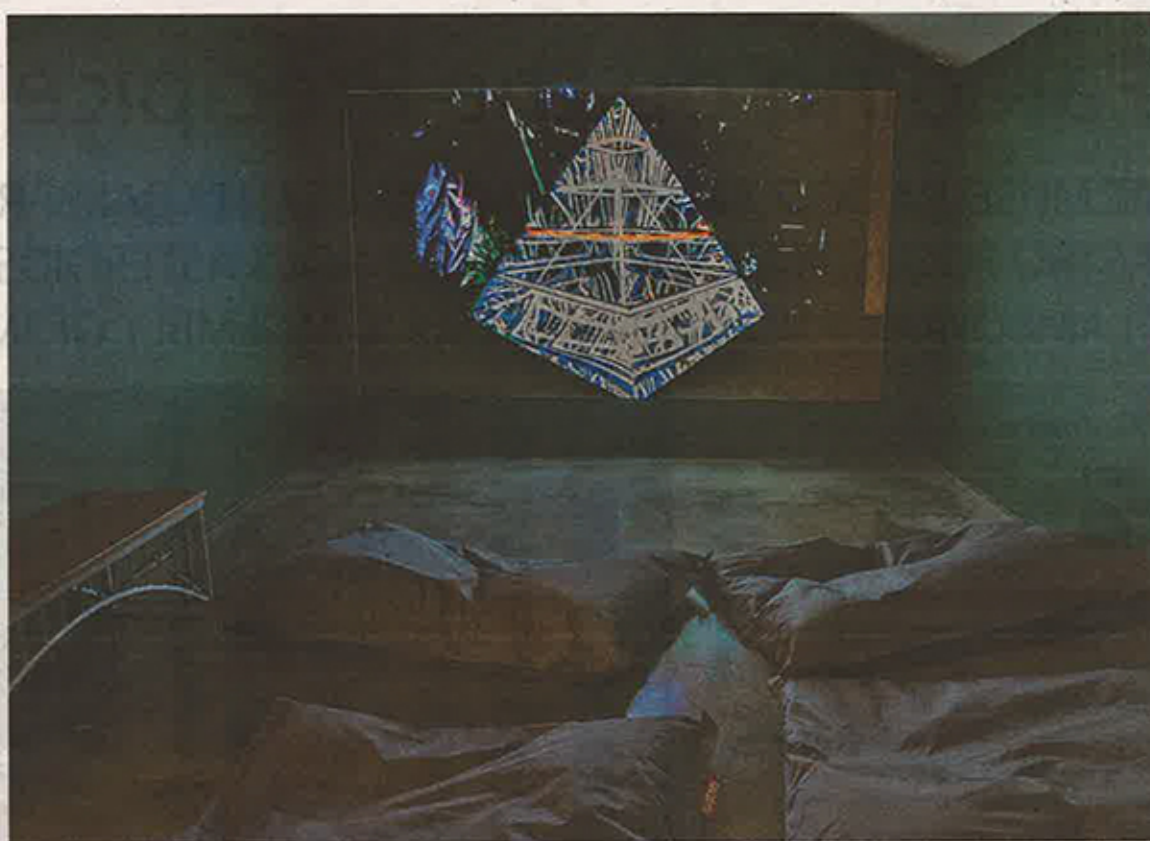
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2005. Fifteen years down the road this MCASB show, organized by the Museum's director Miki Garcia, is described as a "quasi-retrospective," which incorporates existing works in the "avaf" archives while weaving in new materials.

Among the numerous reference points and borrowings in this dense thicket of stimuli are the ecological and social tensions, and street tagging and "carnival" culture of Brazil — timed just after the Olympics gave the world a window on life there, however selective — and artworld touchstones including the influence of Matisse, Sonia DeLaunay and Alexander Calder's circus work, a side show to his mobile reputation. More recent, topical references include nods to the mass shooting in a gay nightclub in Orlando in June, germane to the strong LGBTQ community-sensitive element of the collective.

A blur of visual and topical input greets the senses, and the main gallery space happily disorients the visitor by blanketing the floor with paintings and photo transfers on rugs. On the floor, the dizzying range of material runs from cartoony, wild style abstraction — bowing to the lingering imprint of Calder's playful sense of color and form — to photographic transfers of nudes, "trannies," masked revelers and Pride paraders. The parade continues, in motion, in the side gallery, which has been transformed into a video theater of sorts, complete with large pillows for those visitors inclined to sit and soak in the roving imagery for a spell. Onscreen, footage of celebrations, sports and abstract razzle dazzle add to the swirling sum effect of the show, generally a bath of muchness not always with apparent meaning attached.

In the main gallery, the walls, meanwhile, carry their own double-edged message, with a black-striped pattern of vertical lines suggesting both a décor touch and prison bars. Organic splotches and swatches of mottled, Matisse-y color are overlaid on the vertical grid, softening the impact. Once again, levity acknowledges yet aims to trump potential sources of gravity, a recurring theme in this show and this aesthetic operation.



Eli Sudbrack and Christophe Hamaide-Pierson photos

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