

Riding the More is More Wave

RESPECTED SAN FRANCISCO-BASED ARTIST BARRY MCGEE HAS TRANSFORMED THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART SANTA BARBARA INTO A WILD HANG ZONE OF POST-PSYCHEDELIC AND SURF CULTURE REFERENCES WITH HIS BEWITCHING INSTALLATION

By Josef Woodard,
News-Press Correspondent



'Barry McGee: SB Mid-Summer Intensive'

When: through October 14

Where: Museum of Contemporary

Art Santa Barbara, 653 Paseo Nuevo

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

Friday and Saturday; 11 a.m. to 8

p.m. Thursday; and 12-5 p.m. Sunday

Information: 966-5373,

mcasantabarbara.org



JOSEF WOODARD PHOTOS

Barry McGee, SB Mid-Summer Intensive.

If one believes in the tricky mandate of summer blockbuster art exhibitions geared towards extending cross-cultural appeal to aesthetes, insiders, outsiders and idle curiosity seekers and tourists, the show "Barry McGee: SB Mid-Summer Intensive" succeeds with funky retro moxie to spare. Contemporary art fans, followers or practitioners of surfing culture (antique and otherwise), and

casual art-goers with a taste for giddily busy more is more atmosphere are welcome here.

The San Francisco-based Mr. McGee, a respected and rising contemporary artist, has densely packed the main and side galleries of the Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara with a happily bleary myriad of objects, paintings, icons, gaudy

fluorescent fonts ... and the proverbial "more." Somehow, it coheres into an aesthetic whole — both admiring of and satirizing fetishism — made up of a crazy aggregate of parts. It's a happy mess of a show, worth hanging out in as much as observing with pinpointing scrutiny.

As the show's title implies, the artist has woven in site-specific references in this town so imbued with an endless summer vibe and has generated a loud buzz of references to the '60s, and beach-minded Bohemianism (weekend style or more fully lifestyle-enabled). And yet the show is also powered by airs of ambiguity, not bogged down by specificity or topicality. We recognize this place and its heap of parts and cast-off bits, but it also feels alien, like a paean to surf culture by someone who doesn't quite get the lingo, or ride the waves.

Self-guided tours are the travel option of choice. No labels, individual titles, wall texts or other extraneous art-comprehension aids are to be found in the gallery; those traditional means of explanation or justification for the art. Instead, artworks in two and three-dimensions conspire toward the character of a more immersive and atmospheric end result, with kitsch and surf/SoCal lore along the way.

At one niche, a startling floor-to-ceiling stack of very used surfboards, flanked by a few



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ABSTRACT & CONTEMPORARY

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SCENE BRIEFS

Rod Stewart alert

It's official. Mega-million selling Brit-gone-Hollywood singer Rod Stewart is headed to the Santa Barbara Bowl. His spotty history of Santa Barbara concerts includes a show at UCSB's Harder Stadium in the 1970s and a show during his controversial but commercially successful "Great American Songbook" chapter at the Santa Barbara Bowl in 2004. His upcoming 2018 Bowl

show arrives in synch with the 73-year-old's new album and tour, "Blood Red Roses," number 20 in his solo discography (not including his albums with the Jeff Beck Group, Faces). We can call him Sir Rod now, after his being knighted in 2016, for his musical and philanthropic efforts. 7 p.m. Sunday, October 21. Santa Barbara Bowl, 1122 N. Milpas St. Tickets are \$64.50 to \$350. 962-7411, sbbowl.com

A female artist convergence

By fluke of scheduling and possibly cosmic forces, a handful of noteworthy female vocalists are filling up SoHo's nightly music dance card. Young indie sensation Phoebe Bridgers plays on Friday, July 20, followed by a rare Saturday night reunion show by Barbara Wood & the Moments. One of the finest and most soulful singers in Santa Barbara's history, who burned up the clubs here in the '80s and early '90s before relocating, returns to the local stage. On Sunday, July 22, the Santa Barbara Jazz Society's monthly

afternoon show spotlights jazz pianist Dena DeRose. (She is followed on Monday by a non-female jazzier of note, trumpeter-singer Nate Birkey). Sunday night turns to the pop vocal stylings of Louise Goffin (daughter of Carole King and Gerry Goffin), and Thursday, July 26, is slated for singer-songwriter Judith Owen, bringing none other than session king bassist Leland Sklar along with. It promises to be a mid-summer week chock full of temptations to get out of the house. SoHo, 1221 State St. Tickets vary. 962-7776, sohosb.com.

Diva one, Diva two

The Filipino singing team known as Diva 2 Diva is paying a return visit to the Chumash Casino, a venue known to cater to Filipino audiences and pop culture — with comedy tossed into the mix, as will happen on Friday, August 3,

Diva deal. The power duo of Kuh Ledesma and Zsa Zsa Padilla, both of whose solo careers go back to the '80s, joined forces in 2002 and have become a popular act, with legs. For comic relief and enhancement, the August 3 show also includes the so-called divas of comedy from the Philippines, Nanette Inventor and Mitch Valdes. 8 p.m. Friday, August 3. Chumash Casino Resort, 3400 East Highway 246, Santa Ynez. Tickets are \$45 to \$65. 800-248-6274, chumashcasino.com.

— Josef Woodard



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bicycles, is less about individual boards than a conglomerative sum effect and a disarming out-of-context sensation. The boards pile up into a heap of identity insignias. Surfboards are periodically strewn through the galleries, singly or in smaller groupings, but the epic pile steals the show, in terms of boards as art statements.

Neo-primitive figures, snatches of spray paint, lowbrow ceramic vessels and other

examples of funk-junk art which split the difference between thrift store merchandise and ironically scruffy artistic expression fill the space. In a sly touch, two tiny wooden figurines with motorized arms act as the miniature graffiti artists in the room.

One enclosed space within the larger gallery is identified as "L. Fong Healing Arts Centre," with a ramshackle entry area leading into the MCASB's side gallery. That space has been duly transformed into a bro-ish lounge area, packed with thrift

store-style paintings, a decrepit couch, vintage TVs screening surf clips and graffiti art in progress.

"SB Mid-Summer Intensive" manages to take aim at larger issues such as consumerist overkill and the rabbit hole of fashions and cultural fixations. More immediately, though, it is a loose-jointed psychedelic bazaar of an installation. For this one, you have to be there to fully experience, appreciate and believe it. Stop by this summer. Air conditioning and stimuli overload are free of charge.



THORN

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philosophy in life. Everybody has problems in life. Everybody does. But most of the time, if you weigh it out in the balance, there is usually more good in your life than bad. That's the message of my album."

In effect, while Mr. Thorn's sacred-profane duality (which he comes to in an authentic way) is unique in contemporary music. He's just working a cultural divide that goes to the very heart of rock

'n' roll and R&B, which grew directly out of the influence of gospel music. Examples of those working both sides of the fence include Reverend Al Green, the great and increasingly respected gospel guitar powerhouse Sister Rosetta Tharpe and, yes, Elvis Presley. (An interesting aside: Tom Jones, whose own gospel roots are becoming ever more important, spoke at his recent Santa Barbara Bowl appearance about his memories of singing gospel songs with Elvis into the wee hours in hotel rooms, during

their Vegas days).

Elvis was born in and spent his early years in Tupelo, before his family moved to Memphis. Mr. Thorn was born in Wisconsin but grew up and still happily hails from Tupelo. There are other links.

As Mr. Thorn told me, without any hubris, "he (Presley) and I have a lot in common. The main thing we have in common is that we both grew up going to two different kinds of churches, where the white people attended and then also where the black people attended. At the white churches,

we learned about a country-western style gospel, which is what they sang back in that time. Then when you went to the black church, you would experience rhythm and blues gospel.

"That was the biggest influence, musically, of my and Elvis' musical style. I never met Elvis, but I heard him say many times that his musical mojo came from church."

Get thee to the church of the Lobero on Wednesday to see what this mojo-dispenser has to testify about.

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