

Art review: Roshia Yaghmai: *Drifters*, Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara, 2021

## Art and Sensibility, Adrift

By Josef Woodard / VOICE

**A** LONG WITH SO MANY AREAS OF HUMAN ENDEAVOR AND PERCEPTION, pandemic lockdown had a devastating effect on the arts and its ability to congregate appreciators and audiences. Each art form suffered its own form of altered, diminished state and sensory deprivation, from the loss of real time/theater in traditionally crowd-sourced live music and theater to the loss of dimensionality and real art space in the fine art world.

Subsequently, the still-recent flinging open (with qualifications) of doors and venues has intensified the experience of returning to the scenes of artistic enterprise and experience. In Santa Barbara, the most dramatic example of a rebirth was the grand re-opening of the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, not only post-lockdown but after a years-long reconstruction and rethink.

But in terms of an art space in town in which the hosting space itself has historically played a major role, the Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara (formerly Contemporary Arts Forum) has vacuum in local arts landscape, and its re-opening and visiting rights represent cause for celebration.

A perfect case-in-point is the newly-opened exhibition/installation by Los Angeles artist Roshia Yaghmai, called *Drift*. Here is a prime example of contemporary art grappling with relationships of physical (and psychic) objects in a given art space, questions about art and perception and other elements



Installation photo of Roshia Yaghmai's, *Drift*

contributing to a state where "being there" is critical, not incidental.

And what, to pose an old, Gertrude Stein-coined but self-reflexive question about L.A. herself, is the there there? On a literal, ingredient list basis, *Drift* combines six of her distinctive abstract acrylic paintings--strategically-positioned on a gently arcing wall

inside the Museum's main gallery--with large, sensuous stones dotting the floor, and gangly gruff pipe sculptures lurking behind the wall (in the "backstage" zone) and in the small Norton Gallery.

But, of course, there is more than meets the eye and spatial senses. The Iranian-American artist's underlying interests work in the margins and contrasting inter-relationships of the physical and the perceptual, and the unique, iridescent—and even, yes, psychedelic--abstractions of her wall pieces. Transformation is a running theme, including the transformation of our experience in the gallery, even if with unresolved questions intact.

Her six large acrylic paintings touch on various ideas and cultural reference points, from retooled and Persian art and design ideas to the illusive "Light and Space" movement in LA during the '60s, suggesting an industrial production process in the conjuring despite their sensuous visual effect. Her dream-like and diaphanous panels blur (key word: "blur") the line between paintings and sculptural

objects, which can change hue and suggest optical waves and grains as we move around them.

Stones on the gallery floor serve as grounding objects, with links to nature and a spare, Zen-like stone garden countenance, pulling us out of a stricter gallery consciousness. In the margins, rustic twist-up sculptures are mangled into shapes which, despite the "funk art" aspect of their material are carefully enfolded and visually resolved artworks murmuring in the mix of *Drifting*. A foursome of these piped sculptures, in her "Optometer" series, are given proper, conventionally gallery-centric staging, one to a wall, in the small Norton gallery.

In a sense, Yaghmai gently pushes at and alters impressions of what art is, how it can operate, and how its cultural baggage toys with our perceptions. But clearly, you have to be there to "get it," or get at it.

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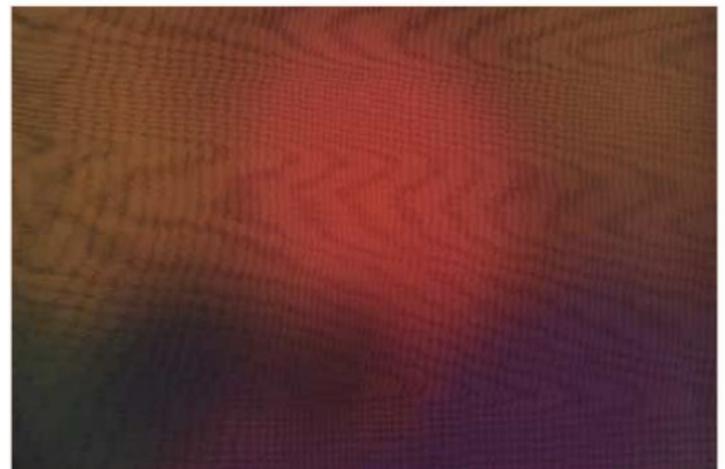
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*Afterimage, Red Eye, 2021.* (detail) by Roshia Yaghmai. Acrylic and ink on organza and cotton. Framed dimensions: 60 x 43 x 2 3/4 inches (152.4 x 109.2 x 7 cm).

Image courtesy the Artist and Kayne Griffin