

Review | 'This Basic Asymmetry' at MCA Santa Barbara

Group Show in Santa Barbara Explores Bias in Perceptions of Self and Others

By [Charles Donelan](#)

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The five artists included in *This Basic Asymmetry*, an intriguing group exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara through April 17, can all be understood as addressing a fundamental bias in human perception. When we think about ourselves, we draw on a rich blend of feelings, sensations, and thoughts that come together in the process we label as introspection. When we think about other people, we tend to discount their internal reflection and judge them instead on our observations of their behavior.

For Simone Forti, the artist and choreographer responsible for "Flag in the Water" (2015), the extraordinarily moving video that plays on the back wall of the gallery, washing an ambiguous pair of hand-sewn flags in the Mississippi River becomes a way of dredging up complex feelings about land, self, and nation.

In the elegant large-format photographs of Paul Mpagi Sepuya, the artist's body plays hide-and-seek while taking the picture. Miguel Angel Payano Jr. combines sculpture, painting, and collage in deftly disturbing images that recall vintage surrealism and the illusionistic portraiture of the 16th-century Milanese painter Giuseppe Arcimboldo.

Two large sculptures by Patricia Ayres dominate the main room with an impressive display of bodily abjection. These lumpy piles of stained fabric deliver a frisson of disgust that nails the vibe of asymmetric bias.

Finally, Gabriela Ruiz has created an eerie installation in a side room that requires viewers to don disposable shoe covers before stepping into a blue-tinted sandbox. "From Above" (2021) and "El Camino Solo" (2021) use wood, plaster, cloth, foam, plexiglass, spray paint, and a surveillance camera and TV monitor to deliver an immersive experience that's either entrancing or uncomfortable, depending on your perspective. It's a terrific piece and well worth the effort of slipping on the booties.

See mcasantabarbara.org.



Miguel Angel Payano Jr., "Good Union a k a The Cyclops," 2021. Acrylic, oil faux gold foil, mirrored plastic and glitter on linen and aluminum stretcher | Credit: Courtesy