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Sunday, August 28, 2005 Part 2 of Reunion Exhibit in Santa Ana

by Daniella Walsh, Special to the Register

Twenty-five years ago, the Orange County Center for Contemporary Art came to life as an exhibition and marketing venue for newly graduated, emerging artists. To celebrate this quarter-century birthday, past and present members reunited under Exhibitions Director of Pamela Grau-Twena in a two-part exhibition (Part 1 closed recently) that gives today's viewers a sampling of their work.

Part 2 is somewhat less diverse and powerful, featuring more monochromatic and abstract works than its predecessor. Painting dominates, with the strongest pieces being amalgams of abstraction and figuration. Jen-Hsin Lin's untitled painting combining disjointed limbs and strong geometric forms, and Laura Hines-Jurgens' "Ecstatic Dancers" with its exuberant brushwork, exemplify such stylistic hybrids.

Suki Berg's "The Three W's" incorporates expressionism, abstraction and figuration. Rendered in tones of blue, green and shades between, it features a man facing two women, one strongly rendered and another more faintly in the background - a family grouping, perhaps, or lovers confronting each other? Energetic and outspoken, and at age 89 OCCCA's oldest member, Berg responded in character when she said that she couldn't explain the title and suggested we find our own meaning.



Suki Berg – The Three W's

Current members Bobbie Mandel and Lilla Hangay work in the timeless medium of wood. Mandel's expressionistic woodcut print "Jane Doe" recalls the stark

linearity of German printmaker Käthe Kollwitz, while Hangay draws and paints on irregularly shaped pieces of wood, either crafted or found, imbuing her work with the warmth and accessibility of folk art.



Bobbie Mandel's "Self Portrait," a woodcut print, is among the works that can be seen through Sept. 25 at the Orange County Center for Contemporary Art's 25th Anniversary Reunion Exhibition, Part II.

Representational painter Carol Goldmark contributed a diptych combining graphite and paint titled "Fleur Mortes #8" that is not one of the more significant examples from her impressive body of work of drawings and paintings. Goldmark sees a profound beauty in dead or dying flowers and plants and renders them with a remarkable skill, which this particular piece, alas, does not fully reveal.

Then again, in the realm of drawing, Shoshana Ernst's "Eve" stands out thanks to its composition and palette. Pastel is a tricky medium and, for the most part, one either masters it as Ernst does or makes a mess. Charlotte Myers' print "Anxious Age" combines abstraction and representation into a deliberately chaotic composition that reflects the times we live in.

Seeing Ann Phong's painting "Growing Up #1" was like running into an old friend. Familiar with her early work, when she first began to record the diaspora of herself and her fellow boat people, I find this particular painting more poignant as a reminder of her narrative talents than as a moving piece in its own right. Phong is overdue for an extensive, local retrospective.

Grau-Twena said it was a challenge to present the work of so many members without making the whole thing look like a garage sale, and that's a point well taken. Incidentally, her installation, titled "Global Conversation," is one of the high points of OCCCA. It consists of 38 dolls with infant bodies and pointy-nosed, adult faces. Thirteen darker versions of the otherwise whitish "babies" are embedded in a mound of rice while the others are grouped into small wooden frames. The piece suggests that the inhabitants of the developing and underdeveloped world may share common humanity but are unable to communicate effectively with each other. Grau-Twena created some dolls from fired clay and others from cast resin to achieve visual contrast between the groups and, while they at first appear alike, closer inspection reveals that each is imbued with an individual personality. Not given to overt political statements in her art, she has made a cogent comment on why we all can't seem to all get along. Since sequels almost never live up to what went before, this show was not intended to be a sequel but a continuation. Unfortunately it does come across as something of a trailer. Its weakness lies in the curatorial mix that placed the strongest works first.

Still, it is worth a trip to Santa Ana to check out some talented individuals, such as expressive sculptor Bardene Allen ("Adam and Eve After the Fall"), or Lynn Kubasek who, with a bit of dadaist cheek, elevates banal objects into works of art ("Profiling").

Freelancer Daniella Walsh has written about visual art for the Register since 1994