

THE DAILY WILDCAT

Magical deceit of California interpreted by modern artists

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California becomes abstract in the “Golden State” exhibit currently on display at the Museum of Contemporary Art in downtown Tucson.

Part of the museum’s “Artist as Curator” gallery series, the exhibit features work by 10 Californian artists chosen by Drew Heitzler, a California-based multimedia artist. As a curator, Heitzler said he prefers collecting pieces that build a cohesive narrative.

The narrative of “Golden State” is a tumultuous journey of illusions, symbolism and complexity. Displaying the grungy aesthetic of an industrial warehouse, the museum’s Great Hall houses the “Golden State” exhibit by dispersing its few, small artworks throughout a vast, bleak, empty room.

“The artists make work that presents the arguments that make contemporary art interesting,” said Heitzler, who is also displaying a solo exhibition of videos and photographs in the museum’s East Galleries.



Courtesy of Christian Ramirez/Museum of Contemporary Art
Liz Craft’s 2011 mixed media work titled “My Lovely Assistant” on display in Drew Heitzler’s “Golden State” exhibit at the Museum of Contemporary Art in downtown Tucson.

Some objects are obvious to their relation to California culture, and others are more avant-garde. Liz Craft’s ceramic construction titled “My Lovely Assistant” is an unsettling and fascinating representation of Hollywood’s magical allure of artificiality. Taking the concept of a familiar magic trick, Craft has built two boxes with the head and feet of a white-plastered mannequin sticking out of both ends, suggesting the “girl-sawed-in-half” convention. Craft accompanies her work with a video of a magician wheeling the figurine through the streets of California.

“I’m drawn to stuff like couches on the side of the road or people that I know. ... The world is surreal enough as it is,” Craft said in a 2011 interview with *Beautiful/Decay* magazine.

Samara Golden's acrylic artwork titled "Mask" also embodies the theme of Californian facades with painted, disfigured human faces across moldy-colored blocks. Golden stacks the blocks in a messy, discarded pile to suggest Hollywood's quick adoption and disposal of human identities.

"California is a disaster," Heitzler said. "Made of fire, smog, magic, movies and technology. It's a 21st-century suicide trip."

Lucy Dodd magnifies California's beach culture by building a waterfall-like sculpture out of blue-painted ropes. Aptly named "Beyond Blues, Seas, Skies, Eyes, Butterflies and Daisies," Dodd's work hangs from the wall like a mystical portal into a natural world of underwater life. The odd audio effects of whale noises over the Great Hall loudspeaker adds to this aquatic effect.

On the other side of the spectrum, Scott Benzel presents his display titled "LAAIR / The Traveller's Companion Addenda" as a literary puzzle of allusions and analogies. Benzel, a UA graduate, picks classic literature titles such as Vladimir Nabokov's "Lolita" and James Joyce's "Ulysses" and places them under a wooden display case beside trashy, dime-store pulp fiction, such as "Fuzz Against Junk" and "Satyr Trek."

Benzel seems to be making an ironic statement on the ineffectiveness of censorship, but the artwork's relationship to the exhibit's California theme is not as obvious.

Other artists on display include Theodora Allen, Amy Yao, Lucy Raven, Mungo Thomson and Pentti Monkkonen.

Monkkonen's creation of a model steamboat titled "The Merce Cunningham" is amusing to the eye with its bizarre mythological figures carved into the boat's sides, but its symbolism alludes to the tempestuous storm California is drifting into. Modern art may be the life preserver that can save the state from drowning in narcissism.

The "Golden State" exhibit will be on public display until Dec. 7. General admission to the museum is \$8, and visiting hours are from noon to 5 p.m., Wednesday through Sunday.