

Lui, Diane Chin. "Flat-out Talented!" Rev. of Flatlanders Exhibition, UCD, Nelson Gallery; Davis, CA Davis Enterprise, 15, July 2010. <http://www.davisenterprise.com>

By Diane Chin Lui July 15th, 2010
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Life takes a slower and more leisurely pace during the summer.

Vacations and hot weather contribute to an unhurried season. Along with the easier tempo of the days, one may need to search a little harder for things to do and see.

For a quick fix and satisfying visit, the UC Davis Nelson Gallery offers a summer treat that requires little planning or expense.

During the short walk from the parking lot to the gallery, visitors begin with a walk along a cool shady trail within the Arboretum's redwood forest.

Upon entering the gallery, one can meander through a bright, colorful collection of paintings and sculptures. The "Flatlanders 3" exhibition showcases eight Sacramento-area talents, much in the manner of this exhibit's two predecessors. From serious to humorous, each work offers a different portal to puzzle over artistic meanings and visions.

Mitra Fabian offers the equivalent of finding pictures within clouds, with a wall sculpture of binder clips in "Cling." Fabian transforms a simple, everyday object into an artistic medium. The rhythmic curves of the black clips may remind one of trees or distant mountains that hug a fog-bound landscape.

Patrick Marasso's paintings resemble candid photographs of social gatherings. As with a picture taken during a party, some people look at the camera while others glance away. Some paintings show a cropped-off arm or only part of a person, as in "Someone's Kitchen."

Questions emerge: Did the artist copy a photograph? If not, why paint a work to resemble a photograph? What does this say about the nature of fine art?

Ianna Frisby finds another way to question presumptions about art, with embroideries that resemble the illustrations used for sewing patterns. One could assume that such drawings were for the sole purpose of providing a picture of the finished garment. By creating the pictures using needle art, the embroidery medium turns the work into a "one of a kind" effort: The drawings become "art," and the illustrator becomes an artist.

Jack Ogden's enigmatic portraits focus more on body language and less on facial expression. In "P in Double B," one can barely make out the features of a man in a double-breasted suit. Nevertheless, we know to get out of his way, as the stocky man stomps aggressively forward, apparently ready to bowl over anyone in front of him.

"Bleu" may be how a slump-shouldered painter feels about his work. Alternatively, the work may comment on color field painting — characterized by large canvas areas of flat, solid color — that was completed by using a house paint brush.

Different narratives can be surmised for each of Michael Stevens' wooden sculptures. For "Three Wishes," a man grasps the trunk of a tree as he surveys three suitcases on the ground below him. He must make a decision quickly, before a saw finishes cutting the trunk. We're reminded of situations that place us out on a limb, faced with a hard choice.

Irving Marcus uses color in seductive and alluring ways that belie the more sinister implied subjects of his paintings. Cool blues and pinks, with bright red focal areas, create multiple viewpoints of life in "Brothel." A young woman carrying a small child whisks by a frowning woman, as she slouches and slinks along the street.

Toys, figures and African sculptures fill Jim Albertson's brash and reactionary paintings. "Mania" feeds our occasional fear of clowns. Against a background of "cheerful" friendly drawings of clowns, a ghostly white-faced jack-in-the-box and a long-necked clown stare benignly at the viewer. Behind them, as alter egos, two dark African masks grin with apparent malice.

In "Shelf Life," candy-colored toys appear to represent an older generation of playthings.

Finally, Suzanne Adan's whimsical work presents a tapestry of flat figures and symbols that are filled with tiny textural brushstrokes. In "Flying Colors," the work presents images of parts of animals and trees, like toy blocks that allow one to mix animal heads to form new beings.

Her other works also are an assemblage of painted sections that could be considered whole endeavors by themselves. When assembled in their present arrangement, they present an entirely different narrative.

I offer such thoughts only as suggested meaning of these works. The artists of "Flatlanders 3" provide thought-provoking starting points in conversations that may begin in the gallery ... and last all the way home.

"Flatlanders 3: A Regional Roundup"

Continues through Aug. 15 at the Richard L. Nelson Gallery, 124 Art Building, UC Davis; (530) 752-8500

Gallery hours: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday, Friday by appointment, and 2 to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday
