

# 3 artists play with media for startling results

## Angels Gate exhibition highlights winners of 'On Site' competition

By Peter Frank

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It's fitting that the "Solo Series of Three" exhibit happens at Angels Gate right around the time the Oscar race heats up. In the "Solo Series" are featured the winners of each "On Site at The Gate" juried competition the previous year. Last summer's "On Site" was selected by former Long Beach Museum of Art curator Josine Ianco-Starrels; her win, place and show comprise the current exhibition.

If anything unites this "Solo Series" trio stylistically, it's a tendency to mix media freely. Startling texture, form and color combinations result from this no-holds-barred approach to materials. Even when size is modest and composition relatively refined, even symmetrical, as in Long Beach resident Judith Bell's wall pieces, the work has an abiding, endearing peculiarity. Bell's objects, hybrids of painting and sculpture, often suggest wall fixtures in shape.

Their surfaces appear mottled, even weathered, however, as if these ersatz sconces and cabinets had been removed from an old house or had even been fashioned from a ship's prow. Examination of their markings quickly reveals that almost every one, no matter how oddly shaped, bears some painted detail. Such detail is usually representational, a portion of a figure grouping or a landscape, and quite often borrows from an art-historical source — Goya, say, or Michelangelo. This gives the already aged-looking objects a second layer of venerability. This could be very gimmicky, but Bell's sense of understatement keeps it all in perspective.

In her own painting-like works **Nena Amsler** capitalizes even more overtly on the sensuous decrepitude of materials — what the Japanese revere



At the Hippodrome: "Las Artistas" features Francisco Toledo's "La Rana Tracona."

as *sabe no wabe*. Indeed, in Amsler's hands, destruction and decay are positive processes. By burning myriad holes into unprimed canvas, for example, Amsler turns it into a kind of bunished lace. By propping small, irregular plateaus of canvas off the main painting with forests of rusty nails, the artist invents a weird kind of topography. In one of two related pieces Amsler assembles an ornate latticework of what seems to be gold-painted plaster.

### ART REVIEW

■ "Solo Series of Three: Angels Gate Cultural Center, 3601 Gaffey St., San Pedro, (310) 519-0936. 11 a.m.-4 p.m., Wednesdays-Sundays. Through March 26. Free.

■ John Brockley: Angels Gate Multiples Gallery. See info above.

■ "Las Artistas de Oaxaca": FHP Hippodrome, 628 Alamos Ave., Long Beach, (310) 432-8431. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays. Through April 9. Free.

■ Note: Entries for this year's Angels Gate "On Site" competition are due April 15.

In the other, that Baroque latticework, now stripped of its gilding, flies into pieces. Her most visceral work is her most viscous: a smallish panel thickly coated with an orangey resin in which are suspended what seem to be bugle beads. Gravity has done its work, and the bottom of the panel is a solid stratum of beads, with several strands dripping off the edge.

Michael Andazola's display is the most radical in format, but in it is contained the most traditional artwork in the "Solo Series." Andazola's horse motif recurs in a number of ways, most notably as painted figurines and as stylized black-and-white paintings. Although Judith Bell quotes the Old Masters, she does so in a very skewed manner. By contrast, Andazola renders his images in a fairly straightforward realist-expressionist style. These paintings don't hold up all that well by themselves, but in the context of Andazola's elaborate multipartite installation they turn into icon-like apparitions, parts of a shrine, or a shrine of shrines, laden with votive objects and ritual, theatrical sites. Several cots and chairs indicate that participation in the rites of this equine temple requires staying power.

### John Brockley

Horses also figure prominently in the gouache-enhanced intaglio monoprints John Brockley is exhibiting in the Angels Gate Multiples Gallery. Birds and humans also drop in. All are rendered in an edgy

manner somewhere between naturalism and almost mathematical diagrammaticity. Several of these chalky black-and-white pictures are printed on the pages of an old atlas, enhancing their sense of age and mustiness — that same sense of *sabe no wabe* that pervades the work of the "Solo Series" threesome.

### 'Las Artistas de Oaxaca'

The artists of Mexico's Oaxaca School try to give their paintings a sense not of age and decay but of freshness and immediacy. Their frequent reliance on luminous paper media such as watercolor and gouache provides this sweet-tart aliveness, as do the spirited narratives and allegories they depict.

In the works on view at Long Beach's Hippodrome, selected from FHP founder Robert Gumbiner's collection, there are still a few paintings — including one huge symbol-laden diptych by Sergio Hernandez — that evince a gritty quality of connection to the soil. Mostly, however, the fantasists who populate the small, central Mexican state of Oaxaca follow the lead of the late Rufino Tamayo and concentrate on the incredible lightness of being and near-being.

Senior of the group on view is Francisco Toledo, who deftly cultivates fantasy with his anthropomorphization of animals, economic use of gesture and reliance on watercolor — all combining to make him a kind of Mexican Paul Klee. Maximino Javier's storytelling gouaches are busy with figures, each wrought with such vivid color and detail that they fairly leap off the page like manuscript illuminations.

Other notable *obras de Oaxaca* here, all in this magic-realist mode, come from the minds and hands of Cecilio Sanchez, Eddie Martinez, Alejandro Santiago and especially the folk-style animal carvers Mario Castellanos and Irene Morales Ivanéz. Castellanos shows a wildly splendid, almost electric lizard, while Morales Ivanéz's unidentifiable animal, painted with markings that could have come from aboriginal Australia, stands over 4 feet high on its hind legs and extends a hand — er, forepaw — to shake yours.

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