

Re: Creation A museum curator and local artists discuss work that impresses them — easier said than drawn

By Patricia B. Dwyer & Michael Benninger / Portrait photography by Jeff “Turbo” Corrigan



Thanks to a recent hire by Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (MCASD), the city’s contemporary art scene has gained new perspective. Offering this fresh look is Elizabeth Rooklidge, MCASD’s latest (and youngest) acquisition. She grew up in Laguna Beach, earned a B.A. in Art History from St. Olaf College in Minnesota and a Master’s Degree in the same field from Williams College in Massachusetts, and then moved to San Diego last summer to assume her post as Curator of Contemporary Art.

“It seems that this community has a concentrated vibrancy,” says Rooklidge.

“Many local artists are doing amazing work, and I get especially excited about the activity of younger, emerging artists.”

Being a curator at MCASD is a full-time gig, but Rooklidge has managed to step outside the museum’s walls, immersing herself in the San Diego art scene.

“I’ve enjoyed shows at Space 4 Art, A Ship in the Woods and Bread & Salt, among others,” she says. “I always look for artist-run spaces; their presence, in addition to all of the other more established institutions in town, is telling as to the dedication of the artists, curators and scholars in San Diego.”

PacificSD challenged Rooklidge with a new artistic endeavor — to cite the one San Diego artist whose work has struck her most powerfully. Her choice, Adam Belt, then selected the peer he admires most, and so on, until the chain of 10 local creators had its final link.

The results paint a picture of contemporary art in San Diego, seen through the eyes of those who help make the local scene a thing to behold.

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Admired Artist : Adam Belt



“His show was one of the first I saw after moving here. I continue to be impressed by his interpretations of spirituality, the sublime and humanity’s place in nature—all dauntingly large questions. He tackles subject matter that many contemporary artists shy away from for fear of seeming sentimental or didactic. But Adam’s work is smart and poetic. He addresses these themes with a rigorous yet transcendent Minimalist vocabulary.”
—Elizabeth Rooklidge

ON INSPIRATION: “I’m inspired by the vastness and palpable silence of desolate landscapes, natural phenomena, the silence of the sacred, God.”

ON MATERIALS: “I like materials that reveal their inherent properties or manifest unseen forces or phenomena, such as how glass micro-beads reveal a rainbow in the presence of light. I’m also fascinated by materials that exist and change on a different time-scale than we do, or that embody, reveal or connect with a profound idea—like how television static results from cosmic radiation left over from the Big Bang.”

ON BEING AN ARTIST: “Similar to the way in which a dancer physically interacts with music or a surfer interacts with a wave, an artist actively engages our world and shares that engagement through what is loosely defined as ‘art.’”

ON CREATION: “When I am making or discovering something new and when things come together, I feel I am connecting with something greater than myself rather than creating. I hope to share some of this experience with viewers through my work.”

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Admired Artist : David Adey



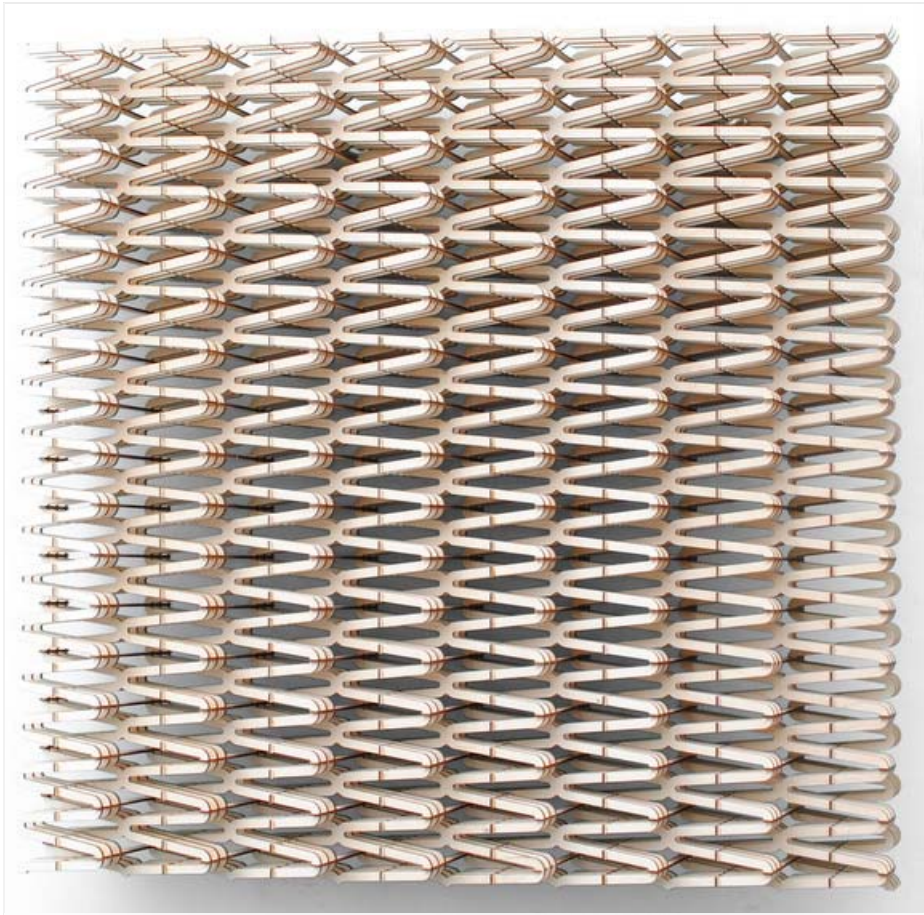
“David Adey continues to blow my mind.

When I saw his installation at the Athenaeum, I was floored. He is a conceptual artist who works through ideas with the appropriate material and process, regardless of his own familiarity. David is thoughtful and rigorous and will follow his work with no compromise. He created a new work wherein collectors had to fill out an actuarial form that led to a calculation of how long they had left to live. Then a digital timer set to that time would begin to count down. Powerful.” —Adam Belt

ON INSPIRATION: “Inspiration can come from anywhere, and nothing is off limits. Sometimes it’s a simple observation or something I notice that I find interesting and it sticks in my head for a while. Sometimes it’s a book or an article or story or movie that gets me thinking about something in a way that I hadn’t before. Sometimes it’s a material or a tool or a process that I learn and it sparks something new. I love the Picasso quote, ‘Inspiration exists, but it has to find you working.’ That’s been true for me. I’m always working and thinking, and my imagination tends to exceed my ability and resources.”

ON HIS VOCATION: “Being an artist means becoming the world’s leading expert at things that are completely useless outside of the context of my own work. It also means I don’t have to wear a tie.”

Admired Artist: Christopher Puzio



“Chris is an architect, designer and

sculptor who works primarily in metal and utilizes 3-D modeling and digital fabrication techniques. His work in recent years has transitioned to focus on major public art projects. He’s inspired by math, science and astrophysics, and creates patterns that often hinge on random chaos. Christopher maintains a fragile sense of order and balance, and knows just how to put it together with all the right elements.” —David Adey

ON PROCESS: “The character of my work pretty clearly shows my obsession with geometric pattern. For big projects, I work with a team of engineers, architects and fabrication experts, but usually it’s just me in the studio drawing and welding.”

ON INSPIRATION: “I’m very thankful for and inspired by the community of artists and designers here in San Diego, especially in the Barrio. Ultimately, though, the materials and tools I work with tell me what to do next and keep the process moving forward.”

ON GOALS: “My personal goal is to keep learning and pushing myself outside of my comfort zone, which is why I prefer doing large-scale sculpture. The bigger installations are always a learning experience.”

ON MATERIALS: “I usually work with metal in one form or another. I like the technical challenges of working with aluminum; it requires some decent equipment and experience to master.”

ON BEING AN ARTIST: “It means making beautiful things. Working with my hands. Creating new techniques and ways of doing things.”

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Admired Artist: Miki Iwasaki



“Miki is an artist, designer and craftsman.

He does everything from large public art projects to jewelry. He’s a renaissance man. I ran a gallery a while ago, and Miki was one of the first artists we chose to exhibit. There is a long tradition of the ‘studio craftsman’ in San Diego that I think Miki falls perfectly into. He’s a perfectionist with a SoCal aesthetic sensibility.” —Christopher Puzio

ON INSPIRATION: “I think all creative people are always keeping an eye open for new inspiration, ideas and connections. It becomes a lens that you see the world through that you cannot remove. I’m also learning to be a father. People talk about how fatherhood changes things, but you never know what that means until it happens. I am lucky to have my son influence my life and work.”

ON MATERIALS: “I really enjoy working with wood, it was my gateway drug. But as technology develops so rapidly, we’re able to work with so many new materials and finishes. It’s an exciting time to be a creative person.”

ON BEING AN ARTIST: “I don’t really like the word ‘artist,’ especially because I find joy in doing more than just creating art. I think many people feel the same way. I think it’s a social convention that we’ve created to classify and categorize professions. I enjoy teaching just as much as working on a creative project.”

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Admired Artist: Matthew Hebert



“I discovered Matthew Hebert while visiting the SDSU Art Department. He does multimedia sculpture, often incorporating technology. His work is very thought-provoking and engaging, with many layers of craft, thought, meaning and humor.”

—Miki Iwasaki

ON CONTEXT: “I make objects dependent upon the space they inhabit. I try to create sculptural objects that change the way one sees the immediate environment or the world around them. For example, I recently made a series of benches, which could move themselves around within a space. They are solar powered and contain motors and sensors that allow them to track the sun in a space.”

ON CONSTRAINTS: “I love to work within constraints. I find myself constantly looking for or creating constraints that I have to work with in order to give myself some limits to push against.”

ON TECHNOLOGY: “I am very inspired, and terrified, by many recent and ongoing technological developments — 3-D printing, CNC fabrication, microcontrollers and other digital technologies all play into my work.”

ON MATERIALS: “I have the strongest background with wood, but also enjoyed working with metals, plastics, electronics, computer, video, photograph. I am probably most excited about materials that lead to 3-D objects, however I find documenting my work in video to be very satisfying.”

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Admired Artist: Jessica McCambly



“There’s a crystalline thread running through all of her work. She is very interested in creating quasi-organic forms through the use of foam, glass, paint, paper and the wall itself. I’m very fond of her work because of her rigorous exploration of materials. She also creates forms that strike a great balance between operating on a larger scale and the scale of the tiniest detail. Her larger installation works — as well as her tiny, site-specific alteration to the wall — are both very dynamic.”—Matthew Hebert

ON GROWING UP: “My mother was always taking me to museums, galleries and street fairs. While other teenage girls were begging to get dropped off at the mall, I was getting dropped off at the Dallas Museum of Art. During elementary and middle school, I’d get up early to paint or draw before school and be super eager to get back at it at the end of the day. I spent all of my allowance at the art supply store each week. I had this intense urge to make, and that was all I wanted to do, all of the time. Everything else was just an interruption.”

ON MATERIALS: “I love the immediacy of paper and how it retains its delicacy while also being quite resilient. I’m interested

in pushing and exploring the potential that exists in both traditional and less traditional art materials and their application.”

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Admired Artist: John Oliver Lewis



“He creates complex yet whimsical sculptures that visually transform the heaviness of ceramic into colorful, squishy, soft surfaces. His work today is so interesting because it is so playful, yet there is such clear evidence of really smart and strategic decisions being made. I respond to the tension that exists between these elements in the work. Additionally, the work is so innovative, so thoughtful, so informed and so well-crafted that, when you see it in context of those subtle beginnings seen in the early work, it is like he just knew... before he even knew that he knew.”

—Jessica McCambly

ON HIS WORK: “I make abstract sculptures that reference cartoon imagery, candy, ice cream, natural land formations — and that are sometimes anthropomorphic. The work sometimes takes the form of installation.”

ON MATERIALS: “I’m a clay guy and I use acrylic paint on the surfaces of my ceramic sculptures. I also use painted Styrofoam in my work. The lightness of the material allows me to defy the gravity of the sculptures by taking the vocabulary of the sculptures out into the actual space.”

ON BEING AN ARTIST: “Being an artist means contributing to a collective dialogue. It means being part of a culture of people who make things and look at things and talk about the things that they make. The byproduct of this dialogue is the opportunity for a community to have an experience with my work. If they get a kick out of it, that is great.”

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Admired Artist: Steve Gibson



“I saw Steve Gibson’s work in Little Italy and was blown away by the complexity, intricacy, craftsmanship and color choices. He is one of those artists who is not bound by theme or style, but is in a constant search for what satisfies him. Steve does not make quiet work, but the work is perfectly crafted. It vibrates and demands an initial reaction from the viewer, but then will hold you through the nuanced, deliberate and thoughtful moments that occur within the piece. This is really hard to do, but Steve manages to do it every time.” —John Oliver Lewis

ON CURRENT PROJECTS: “I’m currently working on a series of paintings on linen. Their antecedents were a series of drawings I did that were shown at a Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego exhibition. The subject matter was a personal narrative based on my early life experiences in the Merchant Marine and surfing around the world. The narrative straddles figuration and abstraction. Ambiguity is a thing that interests me a lot. The new work is loosely landscape based, with a lot of pattern and linear shapes interacting with each other.”

ON BECOMING AN ARTIST: “Making art was the only thing I was ever praised for in my early school years, so I paid attention to it more than any other studies. I was an average student at best and got bored with most subjects, but never with my creative work. I could spend hours working on a drawing or group of drawings. Like most folks, I guess I followed the path of least resistance to my calling as an artist.”

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Admired Artist: Gail Roberts



“Eva Struble is a painter whose previous work has investigated, polluted and damaged landscapes, both urban and natural, that can outwardly appear unblemished and serene. When Gail arrived in San Diego three years ago, she’d already received positive recognition for her work with numerous solo and group exhibitions on the East Coast. She could have easily relied on the success of her previous work, but she embraced her new and unfamiliar environment and chose a more unpredictable, uncertain path. I admire her integrity.” —Gail Roberts

ON GETTING STARTED: “My mother is a sculptor and a rebel in general. My work as an artist probably came originally from my parents... and decades of sketchbooks as birthday gifts. After showing in galleries in New York for years, I gained more of a professional foothold.” ON

CURRENT PROJECTS: “I am working on a project dealing with labor, immigration and agriculture in the San Diego area. Through a nonprofit in Vista, I’ve been helping with visual outreach on labor rights. I’ve also been making paintings based on farms I’ve visited around San Diego.”

ON GOALS AND INSPIRATION: “I’m not as much goal-oriented as I am hoping to be consistently receptive to my work and the work of others. I am always asking myself: ‘What makes this relevant? How does context change my work? How is this work different that what I made before?’ I’m inspired by things I disagree with.”