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Leak of Contemporary Artists

Claremont Graduate University student show spotlights up-and-comers

By: [Stacy Davies](#)



Art galleries really exist for one reason alone: to showcase the work of emerging artists. If you want to see a *master*—say, Van Gogh or Pollack—go to an art *museum*. College-based art galleries always show off new work, of course—it's part of their job—but getting commercial and even independent spaces to do it, ones that need to actually *sell* artwork once in a while, can be a feat. Fortunately, there are places like the dA.

While established artists who continue to redefine the world for us through their own particular lens are always a welcome and necessary staple at the dA, curator Rolo Castillo is a unique champion of new student work and always energized to break new talent. When he does, it seems like the world isn't so bad after all.

In his latest pioneering show, *The Leak of Contemporary Artists*, Castillo has cherry-picked some incredibly fine work from promising Claremont Graduate University students. As usual, he didn't want to cut anyone's arms off with a stringent theme, but there is a theme of sorts, as Rolo points out: While each work viewed alone seems composed of isolated tendencies, when hung together, there is a clear connection of colors and medium. There is a specific shade of green that is stems through many pieces, as well as use of a blackish insulation foam that is unnerving at first sight.

Justin Bower's *Blue Boy: Body Electric*, an enormous portrait of a face in motion, is one such piece steeped in that special green. Looking much like a still frame from some avant garde movie—the perspective of someone on high-powered acid, in fact—the doubled eyes, nose and lips, aren't all immediately clear due to our own eye trickery; once we see them, however, a vibrating reflection of subtle chaos shrouds the face of an otherwise pleasant-looking youth. Laurence McNamara also plays with our vision, his two canvases *Portrait 7* and *Portrait 8* at first appear to be solid blocks of blue and pink respectively, but focus more intently, and the invisible becomes visible in the faces of a dozing and a yawning girl.

That crazy Curious George is also on hand in two pieces from Dion Cuevas, swinging from tires and flying through the air over flashy, splashy graffiti and geometric chalk drawings—and this is our initial introduction to that odd black foam, which both outlines George and creates his tire swing. The foam takes on a life of its own in Jennifer Scrivani's *Burying the Dead*. This triage might immediately remind one of something unseemly that only the olfactory senses could pick up before it's too late, but wait a moment and look again. Are those actually three former residents of Pompeii who've yet to be freed from their ashen tombs? Somehow that's much more comforting and the piece is courageous, to say the least.

Probably my personal favorite is Eric Ward's *Portrait*, an antique frame with a flood of charred wood spilling out from its center. I don't know, perhaps I've seen too many great horror films from the '70s (*Burnt Offerings*, anyone?), but this piece screams backstory and made me want to visit the Haunted Mansion again.

On the softer, more colorful side, Whitney Hanlon's trio of hanging plastic sheets, *Orange, Blue, Pink*, with delicately placed bird cutouts is both whimsical and modern, and her *Pill Buddha: Medication Meditation* with "the awakened one" covered in hundreds of pills (pain relievers and others) is *sui generis*. (Surrounding the Buddha in his enclave are a dozen books on pills and vitamins, and empty drug bottles!)

Other small delights are Karen Chu's *Spoons*—a collection of bent and melted seaweed soup sippers climbing up one of the gallery columns, and Mike McLain's length of plywood stretched

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over by colored rubber bands, called *Thirds*.

Playfulness is at its peak with Jay Merryweather's *Homesteaders*, a honeycomb log torn between territorial brass squirrels with knitted bee covers over their tails and a forlorn deer in a nest on top, and Stephen Wong's enormous squid-like-thing constructed from empty water bottles and trash swimming above rows of-filled water bottles should *absolutely* be the next logo for a "Keep Mother Earth clean" PSA.

The next generation of artists looks promising, indeed.

Leak of Contemporary Artists at the dA Center for the Arts, 252 S. Main St., Pomona Arts Colony, Pomona, (909) 397-9716; www.dacenter.org. Thru April 27, closing reception April 25, 6-10PM. Free

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