

Art, reality, emotion

A revealing look at the art of expressing truth

By Melissa Hiatt

ENTERPRISE ART CRITIC

"Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead," Tom Stoppard's brilliant piece on art versus reality, is playing on a captivating small stage in Sacramento.

By happenstance, a friend's date canceled and the extra ticket fell into my lap. I was — and remain — extremely grateful to play second-choice date in order to witness not only the work of a brilliant playwright, but also its forceful execution.

I digress.

This month's ceramic invasion fills our town with a parade of skills, palettes and subjects. The sheer number of works is dizzying. Sifting

through the legion, and finding the intriguing bits that have the potential to rise above routine — and into a gallery — has prompted me to settle on pieces that depict Stoppard's theme.

Let me explain.

In "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead," two minor characters from Shakespeare's "Hamlet" take on leading roles in an inverse depiction of Hamlet's story: We watch Rosencrantz and Guildenstern when Shakespeare has them off-stage. One of the story's underlying themes is a question concerning the true nature of reality and art, and whether the two are at odds.

Do we merely play at life, moving through the motions as if acting a part? Is it only through performance that we expose our most raw and heartfelt emotions to the world?

Is art the only representation of truth?

After all, an artist can capture something perfectly ... but if the work itself fails to raise questions or emotions within the viewer, is it truly art?

In the words of the late Robert Arneson, world-renown sculptor and UC Davis professor, "What counted most of all was getting that whole sense of spirit into the work — spirit meant a total involvement of the self. If you could get yourself into the piece, then you were going to have something."

The Davis Art Center's Tsao Gallery currently houses some pieces that elicit truth and self, and bring forth art as the deepest expression of what is real.

The show actually is intended for a different purpose: to speak to the evolution of ceramics. Peter Voulkos was responsible for this trans-

'Eight from ACGA'

Where: The Davis Art Center, 1919 F St.; (530) 756-4100

When: through May 22

Gallery hours: 9:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday

formation of ceramics from craft to art, from potter to sculptor. While this Davis Art Center show bears a few exceptional pieces of pottery, "Rock Bowl," from the curator herself, speaks to the transformation.

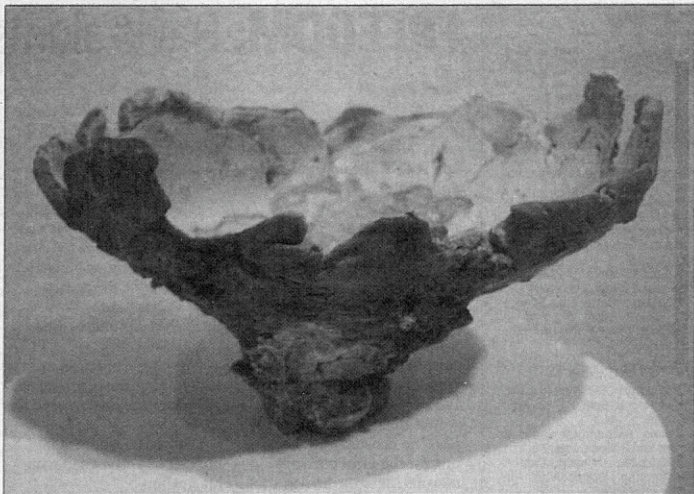
This is no bowl.

Catharine Hiersoux has channeled her own brand of Voulkos and offered up a raw, expressionist abstraction of a vessel that leaves me breathless. A photograph cannot capture the essence of this piece; only an in-person viewing allows for edgy and broken frailty to emerge from such a substantial hunk of clay.

Hiersoux's work is represented in major collections like the Smithsonian Institution, the American Craft Museum, the Everson Museum and the Diane Feinstein Collection.

Among her accomplishments, Hiersoux was commissioned to make place settings for the White House. She is an honorary member of the Association of Clay and Glass Artists of California.

Her curated Davis exhibit is replete with the gamut of emotion: from straight-up humor, found in personified pooches, to the nostalgia of vibrant ancestral figures. The contributing artists — all from California, all nationally recognized — are Christa Assad and Mark Goudy, from Berke-



COURTESY PHOTOS

Above, "Rock Bowl," by Catherine Hiersoux; below, "Shadowplay," by Cynthia Siegel

ley; Bill Geisinger, from Sebastopol; Carol Koffel, Ursula Tilker and Sharon Virtue, from San Francisco; Barbara Glynn Prodanuk, from Truckee; and Cynthia Siegel, from Santa Cruz.

Figurative expressionism emerges through Siegel's work. Her female forms evoke strength and sorrow, and invoke the forces of nature. Her "Pearl Polisher" is a magnificently proportioned sculpture that speaks to singular beauty and acute feminine sorrow. How Siegel has captured both is a mystery and an enigma.

The emotion emanating from this piece truly elevates it to art.

The question — "What is art?" — has been asked for hundreds of years, and continues to be the subject of great debate.

My own answer came during a conference that featured Maya Angelou. Her ideas resonated so deeply that their inherent truth was simultaneously unequivocal and undeniable:

"Art is the tangible expression of emotion."



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"Saint Bernard," by Ursula Tilker