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ART REVIEW : Award season, 20 years on - Winners of the 2008 Arts Fund Individual Artist Awards show the fruits of their grants

By Josef Woodard, NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

April 3, 2009 12:00 AM

2008 INDIVIDUAL ARTIST AWARDS GROUP EXHIBITION

When: through May 8

Where: Arts Fund Gallery, 205C Santa Barbara St.

Gallery hours: 1 to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday

Information: 965-7321, www.artsfundsb.org

For 20 years now, one of the more encouraging and continuing signs that support of the arts is alive and well in Santa Barbara has come in the form of a potent little acronym, the "IAA." In 2008, the Arts Fund of Santa Barbara celebrated the milestone 20th year of its annual Individual Artist Award program, and the winners set to work creating art now the subject of a group show at the Arts Fund Gallery.

Befitting the inherently diverse nature of the awarding organism, this year's exhibition moves in multiple directions and touches on various media. Off to the side of the visual fine arts realm, the Graphic Communication category winners were Scott Anderson and Kendall Pata, whose stylish graphic work hangs on the wall here. In the Music Composition category, Stephen Wilcox and Justin Weaver were winning entrants, and they show scores of their winning pieces.

Variety and elements of surprise are norms among the three recipients in the "painting" category. Longtime Santa Barbara art-watchers will appreciate paintings by Hugh Margerum, who creates deceptively festive, lively and abstract interactions of form and color.

But we may also be surprised to find noted assemblage artist Susan Tibbles hanging out in the "painting" corner. Tibbles' fanciful "Saint Cecilia" (the patron saint of Music) takes a few left turns from her typical work in terms of scale. It's a piece in which her three-dimensionality protrudes outward from a painting at its base. A semblance of a horizon line in the painting anchors a freewheeling confab of objects, including a bow, bridge and pseudo-strings from a cello, and a fanning array of wooden sticks.

In what may be the most disarmingly pleasurable artwork in the house, Joy Davis shows her canny hybrid painting "Motorcycles at Changu Narayan Temple (Tibet)." A scroll painting in the ancient, Asian style, Davis' work glitters and teases with its old and new references, with the centered and centering image of a Buddhist temple and the cheeky presence of motorcycles for good contemporary measure.

Back in the sculpture corner in the back of the gallery, the range of ideas and materials is no less varied. Scott Chatanever's pieces are based on, and spring out of, the seashell motif, while Joan Rosenberg-Dent's witty pieces manipulate our expectations by using ceramic to mimic the texture and flexibility of fabric.

In another corner entirely — and making good use of actual fabric — Richard Aber continues his series of intrigues around the Santa Barbara art scene this season. It started last fall with Aber's epic-conical sculpture on State Street in the "State of the Art Gallery" public art show, and included his recent sanctum-like enclosure at Contemporary Arts Forum. This time around, Aber presents a small, tent-like enclosure called "Structure 2-07," with loosely-overlapped and connected swaths of fabric, like scales on a snake or tiles on a roof, but with a more artistic and metaphorical rationale attached.

At 20, IAA continues to fuel (and fund) inspirations of artists in the 805, and to lend a positive forum to ideas abuzz here. It's a good idea whose time keeps coming.

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