

Los Angeles Times

Peer into CALidoscope

By IMRAN VITTACHI

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Andre Woodward of the Huntington Beach Art Center works to set up an art exhibit by Jennifer Vanderpool, which part of the new art show CALidoscope, which opens on Friday night. Vanderpool's project includes flowers, birds and butterflies made partially of ceramic hanging from the ceiling. (STEVEN GEORGES, HB Independent)

Curator Darlene DeAngelo hopes to stimulate the minds of Surf City citizens through a new show at the Huntington Beach Art Center.

"I am interested in showing this community really new and exciting work, things that you wouldn't normally see in a beach community ..." she says. "I think this community is really intelligent, so it needs things that will challenge them and make them more aware of what's going on in the larger picture of the art world."

On Saturday, the city-operated HBAC will open "CALIdoscope," its main exhibition for the fall 2011 program. The center on Main Street will kick off the show with a reception at 7 p.m. Friday.

Within the building's walls, DeAngelo has brought together four installations individually created by an all-female quartet of contemporary Southern California artists: Rebecca Niederlander, Jennifer Vanderpool, Kimber Berry and Jill D'Agnew.

In their own ways, the works that make up "CALIdoscope" reflect themes that ordinary people can relate to, according to center officials. Each installation represents a facet of the human experience through the loss of jobs, possessions and even loved ones.

"It has heart to it," Kate Hoffman, the center's executive director, says of the show. "Each of the artists is talking about issues of a contemporary nature: home, loss, the impact of media ... "

"This is not a sad exhibit, by any means," she continues. "But it does touch on those issues that help our audience to open their eyes. I think that one of the things that I value about art ... is that we can address contemporary issues in a visually compelling way, and I think this exhibit does that."

The so-called environmental art exhibition, which will run through Dec. 17, comprises four installations set apart by an equal number of rooms.

"What we created were environments based on something that the artist wanted to create as a meandering sort of pathway or labyrinth, so that you sort of walk in and you just look at objects and try to figure out how do those things coalesce," DeAngelo says.

Entering the first of three connected galleries, the visitor will see a spare installation by Niederlander. Dubbed "Grief," the installation combines sound with an assortment of large objects.

Each one represents five stages in the cycle of despair or loss: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. For example, a giant piece of crumpled red paper represents anger.

In the adjoining room is Vanderpool's comparatively more ornate installation, which the artist calls "sweethome."

Her work features two walls, made of brilliantly painted cardboard tubes. Vanderpool has decorated the surfaces of the walls with 3-D "wallpaper" patterned with shimmering flowers that

jut out. In the middle of the room, a field of ornaments that dangle from the ceiling dominate the space.

In her written description of "sweethome," which appears in a brochure for the show, the artist describes these objects as "gooey floral gardens inhabited by fake flowers, birds, and butterflies which hang at viewers' eye levels."

In the third room, Berry has installed a psychedelic painting made up of snake-shaped swirls and strokes of colors that bleed onto the floor. Berry, a longtime Angeleno, calls her work "Liquid Landscape Environment," as it is meant to evoke the illusory world of Los Angeles and Hollywood's propensity for billboards and other large forms of visual advertising.

Finally, in the center's Project Room, off to the right near the main entrance, the visitor can expect a less abstract and smaller-scale installation from the world of the mundane. D'Agnew's "Bad Mother" installation is a family photo album on public display.

Through Facebook and photographs taken over years, the artist has documented the growth of her daughters and poked fun at her own parenting skills.

In one of the pictures, she had her 4-year-old pose for the camera with a cigarette pinned between her right index and forefingers, as the little girl wears a red wig on her head and a faux-fur around her neck. In another photo, the artist has captured a look of astonishment on her older daughter's face as she put a plate heaped with a turkey dinner in front of the lifelong vegetarian.

"The resulting images catalog my failings as a good mother while my children run around and do whatever they please with their time, space and bodies," D'Agnew writes in her official introduction to "Bad Mother."

"If they grow into happy, successful adults, I will in retrospect smugly justify my 'parenting' style," the artist continues. "If they turn into sociopaths, well, the court of public opinion will have all the evidence, presented right here, to 'blame the mother.'"

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If You Go

What: "CALIdoscope"

Where: Huntington Beach Art Center, 538 Main St.

Gallery hours: Noon to 8 p.m. Tuesdays through Thursdays; Noon to 6 p.m. on Fridays; Noon to 5 p.m. on Saturdays; Closed Sundays and Mondays.

More information: (714) 374-1650; <http://www.huntingtonbeachartcenter.org>