

Artweek

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'(un)natural' at the di Rosa Preserve

The group exhibition *(un)natural*, at the di Rosa Preserve, features work by seven Bay Area artists responding to the idea of nature with surprisingly domesticated results.

Ross Campbell's *Digital Palm* (2008), *Digital Tree* (2007) and *Digital Bushes* (2009) are pragmatically crafted from wood and cardboard and coated with enough spray paint to articulate pixilated foliage, riffing on a video game programmer's visual economy of slapdash backgrounds. The works are scaled to refer to landscaping, and pruned to a size appropriate for shading a virtual yard or decorating a video game resort. Ostensibly, the trunk leaves were once part of a living tree, an irony promoted by their overt artificiality. A more subtle

idea is that the trees they simulate aren't even wild varieties themselves, but domesticated versions that represent nature to a domesticated populace.

Natural Selection (2008), by Lucrecia Ironcoso, is a plasticized tufted mat made from swatches of digital prints color matched from an image of actual grass. As a simulation, the piece is emphatically and successfully unconvincing. Like the paint job on Campbell's trees, the even density and color distribution here suggests a digital texture map. What is represented is not a living type of plant, but an ideal to which golf courses, lawns and picnic spots aspire, that icon of fecund life in a sterilized domestic realm.

Carrie Lederer's raucous green installations, *Mr. Dunlop and Ms. Wilson Out For a Stroll in Nature* (2009) and *The Shape of Nature: An Offering* (2009), are made with tennis balls, fake plants and vegetables, toys, slices of tree stumps, pussy willows, moss and other decorator detritus. Achievements of obsessive decorating and collecting, these large-scale works spill from the walls, grow out of the floor and hang from the ceiling, striking a rough balance between cohesive unity and dissolution into discrete surprises. Within the space claimed by each work exists a microcosm of the outdoors-ish populated by a friendly cast of characters—nothing threatening, hungry

or poisonous.

Misako Inaoka's *Moss Thunder* (2008) and *Prakee Plants* (2007) hover

between the playful and the strange. Perched on flocked display stands and protected under bell jars are two amalgamations of toys and plastic plants, each in the shape of a bird. The instability of the border between familiar figures and unknown

species, and the implied habitat of origin, is subdued under the sealed glass dome. Inaoka questions the permanence of this solution by crafting three-toed feet for the displays, as if the entire work could completely transform and begin to move around on its own.

Curator Michael Schwager expertly places Jessica Cadkin's *Separation, Alignment, Cohesion* (2008). A black flock of pinched organza suspended by dozens of monofilaments

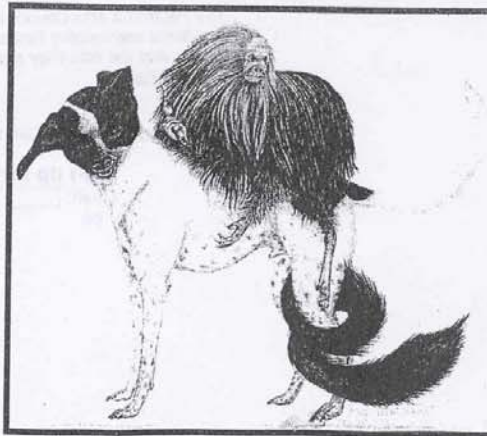
from the ceiling is positioned directly in front of the gallery's window. The arrangement of artificial birds intermingles with the real barn swallows visibly nesting in the awning outdoors, inviting comparisons between the static arrangement inside and the intermittent, lively acrobatics of the colony thriving outside.

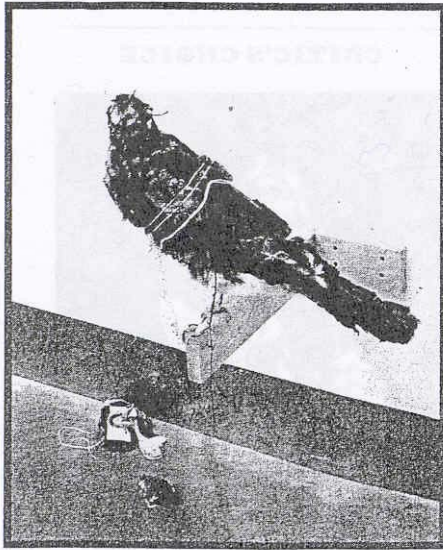
Bear's Big Night Out (2008) by Tara Tucker is an image of a bear scented by gamecocks. Tucker's intricate graphite rendering catalogs surface textures. The effect is metaphysical, as if spirit ani-

mal portraits illustrating a Carlos Castaneda novel, inviting the viewer to identify with the subject, rather than consider its place in an external world.

Like a bird-watcher collecting bits of observations, Kathryn Spence works with pieced-together materials. *Untitled (Snowy Owl)* (2006) and *Untitled (Juvenile Northern Harrier)* (2009) render the rough gestures, anatomies, expressions and textures of her specimens. Obviously re-created, from such comically mundane materials as Beanie Babies,

Top: Ross Campbell, *Digital Palm*, 2008, cardboard, spray paint, 12' x 7'; bottom: Tara Tucker, *I've got this feeling that we've been here before*, 2007, graphite on paper, 15' x 11', at the di Rosa Preserve, Napa.





Kathryn Spence, *Untitled (Juvenile Northern Harrier)*, 2009, upholstery remnants, towel, stuffed bears, Beanie Babies, dirt, colored pencil, paper, wire, string, thread, at the di Rosa Preserve, Napa.

towels, a stuffed bear, curtains, thread and wire, the results are more convincing at ten paces than museum taxidermy.

(un)natural functions as a cohesive whole to build a shifting definition of the idea of “nature” while exploring the possibility that our familiarity with the natural ranges from piecemeal to imaginary, a pressing idea that seems ripe for further evaluation.

—Mary Anne Kluth

(un)natural: Jessica Cadkin, Ross Campbell, Misako Inaoka, Carrie Lederer, Kathryn Spence, Lucrecia Troncoso and Tara Tucker closes June 13 at the di Rosa Preserve, 5200 Sonoma Hwy, Napa.

Mary Anne Kluth is a freelance writer based in San Francisco.