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ART REVIEW: Impressions of Place, This Place - L.A.-based artist Fran Siegel examines the human and natural setting of the Santa Barbara region with her exhibition 'Translocation and Overlay'

By Josef Woodard, News-Press Correspondent
December 6, 2013 2:18 PM

ART REVIEW

"Translocation and Overlay"

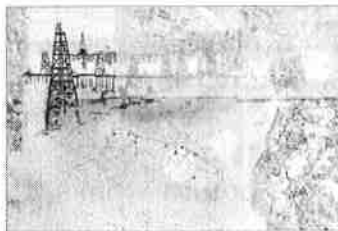
When: through Dec. 13

Where: Art, Design & Architecture Museum, UCSB

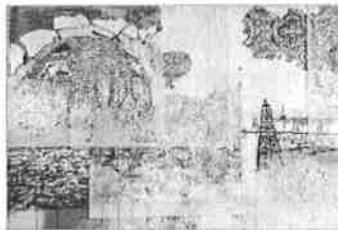
Hours: noon to 5 p.m.
Wednesday through Sunday

Information: 893-2951,
museum.ucsb.edu

In the fairly hot-button atmosphere of the current roster of exhibitions at the UCSB AD&A Museum, shows dealing with the '60s Civil Rights movement and early '70s Isla Vista protests, and a show of art about social commentary and "discontents,"



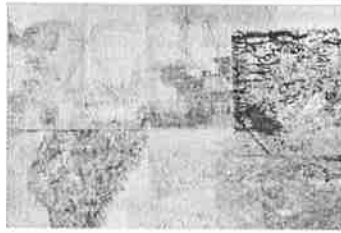
All drawings are details of the installation, Art, Design & Architecture Museum, UCSB photos



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Fran Siegel's light-on-the-eyes show in the entryway Nachman Courtyard Gallery might seem, deceptively, like a pool of calm. Gazed at superficially, the L.A.-based artist's show consists of large, faint drawings and delicate lace-like cutouts, placed with seeming absent-minded randomness on the walls of the tall-ceilinged space.



But much is going on beneath the light and lyrical surfaces in "Translocation and Overlay," and the driving concept and roots run deep — in the very soil and general region we call home, in fact. Ms. Siegel, whose work often deals with the nature and the underlying essence of a place, is the AD&A's current artist-in-residence, and she spent over a year and a half researching, experiencing and poetically imagining Santa Barbara's life, in cultural and natural terms.

Upon closer scrutiny, Ms. Siegel's show of drawings and porcelain pieces — really an "installation" of sorts — covers a lot of terrain, so to speak, and to use her term, "overlays" information culled from varying depths of history and natural phenomena of land, sea, sky and fire. Subject-wise, she moves in a non-linear way (thanks partly to the arbitrary placement of drawings and their lack of identifying info) from drawings of lost Chumash villages in the area to a nod to vineyard life, a sign of the "wine country" times.

Maps and other data-centric lines and grids, caught in some between-zone of scientific documentation and pattern-rippling abstraction — blend in with fleeting imagery of area-related sights, from oil wells and hot-air balloons to beached whales. She coyly gets in on the act of artifact and information gathering, with a pinch of irony, through the use of porcelain facsimiles of specific findings in her travels through Santa Barbara, including impressions of leaves "borrowed" from the Coronado Butterfly Preserve to a tiny replica of a chandelier in the Santa Barbara Mission.

Fire-related pieces have the boldest immediate impact, especially for those of us with lingering and possibly haunting memories of the fires, and the loss and trauma attached. The identifying names of fires, amended with

the year and acreage burned, leap out from the more abstracted drawings, and we may feel pangs of painful memory are affected by the very words attached — Sycamore (1977), Tea, Jesusita and the Gap (with the word sly presented in the font of the clothing chain).

It all conspires to a unique portrait of place — our place — in an exhibition which is at once systematic, research-grounded, rational loosely poetic and tied to her own brand of neo-impressionist end game. She packs a lot of background and backstory info into the show, which can be fascinating and revealing even to longtime residents. But the individual viewer is left with the decision over how seriously to consider the info parade and how much to let the purposely mixed and decontextualized material to just wash over, like a sensuous wave of site-specific, but detail hazy visuals.

