

NEW LIGHT

Artist's work reflects coast's changing conditions.

By Paul Clinton, More San Pedro

Fran Siegel moved to San Pedro because she needed a place to live.

The New Yorker, who left her crippled city shortly after 9-11 for a fresh start, had accepted a position teaching art at California State University, Long Beach.

Her move to town may have been for practical reasons, but it inspired her as an artist and played a prominent role in her work, she said.

Since moving to San Pedro in 2002, she said she's been fascinated by the changing light and diverse atmospheric conditions that alter visibility of the cliffs of San Pedro's coast.

"There's something about the edge of the coast," Siegel said. "How it's fluctuating and in constant change is what attracts me to that place."

Siegel has produced four pieces of her artwork for an exhibition in Los Angeles of 10 visual artists given a fellowship grant by the city of Los Angeles. Her work can be viewed until June 11.

Siegel's pieces should be seen as complementary, said Mark Steven Greenfield, the executive director of the city's Department of Cultural Affairs.

"The pieces create a dialogue between themselves," he said. "The light hits one of the reflective surfaces, which throws a reflection into another piece. It's not immediately discernible to the viewer. It's like an inside joke."

In the show's catalog, Siegel describes herself as "a painter who paints with light."

With the installation art she provided for the show at the Municipal Art Gallery at Barnsdall Park, Siegel again incorporated San Pedro's horizon into her work.

In "Viewpoint," Siegel mounted nearly 20 mylar tubes into a gallery wall.

Looking through the lenses reveals small pictures of the horizon that Siegel took at various vantage points and times of the day. Several tubes are clear or reflect to the viewer, causing disorientation, she explained.

San Pedro makes another appearance in "Site Line," a wall sketch of the coast with strips cut from other coastal contour maps hanging from strings stretched horizontally in front of the piece. It creates a three-dimensional effect.

Siegel hung the fragments of a larger image to break apart the image. She said she is showing how the coastline changes in a natural state of flux.

With "Tracking Points," Siegel uses magnifying lenses, mirrors, mylar, colored acetate, sticks, wood, wire, mica ink and tumbleweed on a wall.

With the piece, Siegel demonstrates her ability to get the viewer to see her piece in different ways. Different lenses magnify or reduce the image of the piece, she said.

"The first thing you get is the visual sensation," Siegel said. "Then you start to look at it and that's when you get the information."

Siegel studied painting in Philadelphia at Temple University's Tyler School of Art in the early 1980s. She earned a master's degree in painting at Yale University in 1987.

After moving from New York in 2002, she converted a commercial building in San Pedro into a private live-work loft.

Shortly after arriving, Siegel produced a series of silk-screen printed photographs offering her perspective on the San Pedro coast called "Strata."

The series departed from her earlier work, moving into a more risk-taking realm, Siegel said.

"The light I had worked with before was bouncing off other buildings," Siegel said. "The work I've been doing here is much more open and experimental."

In all, 15 artists were given \$10,000 grants this year from Cultural Affairs. The department has been handing out the grants since 1996.

The city doesn't set many parameters, except that the artist should produce an original piece for the show, Greenfield said.

"We start off with an idea, but it usually becomes something else," Greenfield said. "We let the artists choose, as long as they don't put raw meat on the wall."