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ROBERT TAYLOR: FINE ARTS

## Pencil me in for current Bedford exhibit

Contra Costa Times

Article Launched: 10/25/2007 03:04:48 AM PDT

Does anyone use a pencil anymore, in this era of high-tech notes, design and illustration? Artists still do, and a touring exhibit at the Bedford Gallery in Walnut Creek, "Leaded," shows that they continue to find imaginative uses for the prosaic graphite pencil.

They work with soft, shiny graphite patterns that look like black pearls. They draw patterns, then erase another pattern through them. They meticulously hand-copy smudged prints from office copiers. They mix graphite powder with oil and resin to create rich, baroque designs.

On a larger scale, they build a towering, 7-foot-tall pencil sculpture that might be a neo-Gothic monument to Victorian clerks and accountants.

It's as if the exhibit's curator, N. Elizabeth Schlatter of the University of Richmond in Virginia, handed out pencils to a group of artists and said, "Show me what you can do."

A pencil drawing on plain white paper is a rarity among the 44 works in the show, which runs through Dec. 22. But the expansive installation and the black, white and gray images give the Bedford a particularly crisp, clean, uptown atmosphere.

The constructions will attract the most attention. Tara Donovan uses the stubs of 17,000 pencils, varying in height, to create "Colony," which spreads across a 9-by-12-foot platform close to the floor.

"Colony" can be viewed from several angles, and it takes on varying forms -- it might be a spreading amoeba, a ragged-edged island in a marshland, or in a small section, the miniaturized high-rise skyline of Hong Kong. Donovan's goal is for the assemblage of everyday objects to look different to every viewer.

Michael Galbreth and Jack Massing, known as the Art Guys, use thousands of sharpened No. 2 pencils (with what appears to be a cedar shaft) to build a fanciful ... something-or-other. It could be the model for a skyscraper in the 1920s, a space-age emperor's palace, a Victorian plaything drawn from Gothic and Oriental vision.

In case we're taking "Bonded Ability #55 (Skyscraper)" too seriously, the Art Guys include an 8-foot-tall chart that suggests it's a parody of architectural competitions. It includes plans and sketches, ticket stubs to the Empire State Building observatory, and an old illustration of the Prince Albert memorial in London's Kensington Gardens. The caption calls it "one of the world's worst monuments."

What might be called drawings in the exhibit are not just black-and-white.

Molly Springfield does great big drawings filled with what must have been agonizingly meticulous detail: pencil reproductions of the pages of book pages. There are folded pages, fragments of pages, collages of pages that might have come from a bad office photocopier. According to the exhibit notes, Springfield discovered in high school in Florida that she enjoyed hand-copying text more than she did

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writing it.

Mark Sheinkman's works look like time-exposure photographs of cigarette smoke, but they're swirling pencil drawings reduced with subtle erasure.

Stephen Sollins draws over pages of a catalog for outdoor gear, isolating a few tents and a tent-camper as the only surviving illustrations. His soft, shiny graphite overlay covers the rest of the pages like flowing black lava.

HIROSHI SUGIMOTO, the Japanese photographer who divides his time between Tokyo and New York, was featured in an extensive retrospective of his works at the de Young Museum in San Francisco earlier this year.

Now Sugimoto is back with two curious installations at San Francisco's Asian Art Museum. One is a display of 21 extreme fashions by Japanese designers spotlighted under the title "Stylzed Sculpture." The other is a selection of art and artifacts he's collected over the years, gathered and displayed as his "History of History."

The collection is meant to be dramatic, with items discovered one by one or in groups by visitors who make their way through darkened galleries. There are minimal, barely readable labels, white text printed on a gray wall and a brochure to carry, and possibly read, containing Sugimoto's commentary. It's both a revealing and a frustrating experience.

Among the most intriguing displays are fossils from millions of years ago, some of them big panels showing creatures that look as if they're still scurrying through the mud.

There's an expressive, 12th century wood

sculpture of a Japanese temple priest and a fourth century bracelet of carved stone that looks delicately pleated. A turned-wood pagoda contrasts with a souvenir chrome-plated model of the Tylon and Perisphere from the 1939 World's Fair in New York.

Sugimoto has added his own details to some of these objects, inserted his own photographs. It's his collection, after all, that just happens to be showing at a museum. In spite of the printed text that explains his point of view, it's a exhibit for drifting into and drifting out of.

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galleries

BEDFORD GALLERY: "Leaded" through Dec. 22, noon-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Sundays, 6-8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays and during performances at the Leshner Center for the Arts; \$2-\$3, free for Leshner Center ticket holders; 925-295-1417, <http://www.bedfordgallery.org> .

ASIAN ART MUSEUM: "Hiroshi Sugimoto: History of History" through Jan. 6, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays-Sundays, 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Thursdays; \$7-\$12; 415-581-3500, <http://www.asianart.org> .

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