

'SubAnatomy' and Nathan Lynch at MOCA

From the body art movement in 1970s to the piercing and tattooing that have become an integral part of contemporary youth culture, creative types have always looked to the body for inspiration. And although the days since Karen Finley smeared herself in chocolate or Chris Burden took a gunshot to the arm are long past, a strong group show and tangential installation at Santa Rosa's Museum of Contemporary Art proved the *corpus*—animal or otherwise—continues to serve as muse for many emerging artists.

Guest-curated by Chandra Cerrito, *SubAnatomy* afforded each of its seven contributors a unique vision of (and connection to) the body. Works by recent CCA graduate Karen Carlo Salinger were the most directly sculptural: her three-by-three-foot *Hole* appeared as an oversized model of healing epidermis, with layers of urethane "skin" growing around an angry looking puncture; *Screwed* was a stylized shrunken head with

long gnarls of wiry hair; and *Taubie-Feelie*, a pair of fleshy polyps on knotty umbilical cords hung over a hook, was delightfully repulsive.

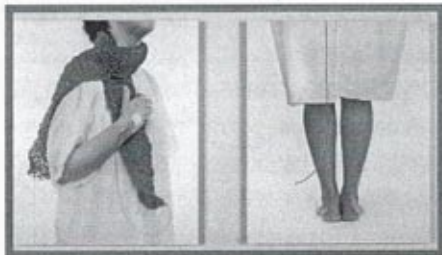
Across the room, Laura Splan translated her background in bioscience at UC Irvine into drawings and photographs made using her own blood (though stylized, in the case of *Blood Scarf*, a diptych of a woman warmed by a plasma-filled wrap knitted from surgical tubing). *Trepidation*, which the viewer slowly comprehended as a mirror-image video zoom of the artist's pricked finger, proved a mysterious, mesmerizing, animated Rorschach test.

With her gritty conceptual/performance piece *Thread & Nail*, San Francisco artist Cheryl Coon investigated the idea of *harming* our bodies: Using short sharp spikes and countless yards of wound thread, Coon fashioned lethal-looking balls the size of kiwis and, at *SubAnatomy's* opening, hurled against one wall, where they stuck. The simple work was hugely evocative, of everything from microscopic blow-ups of viruses, spores, and pollen grains to Ninja throwing stars and Middle Eastern suicide bombings.

If all this sounds overly gory, it wasn't. Less visceral but lovely to behold were two works by Berkeley sculptor Rachel B. Abrams: *Palimpsest* featured a wall of paper tiles with long cilia of glass beads, and *Elaborate Mythologies* a drift of translucent organic shapes fashioned from porcelain. Conceived via artificial insemination, Adams used her work to plumb the snarled history behind single lives.

Other artists tried other takes on the topic, including Brooklyn-based Lynne-Rachel Altman's amazing cast-glass human *Chrysalis* and Philadelphia's Talia Greene's *Bodyscape*, a graceful landform composed of tiny drawings of body parts. The show's only oddball inclusion proved to be Colin Stinson, another CCA grad, whose wall mural *BlackOcean XX*, though it hummed with electric color, felt abstruse and impersonal in this setting.

In contrast to all this bodily stuff,



Top: Karen Carlo Salinger, *Hole*, 2002, urethane on canvas, 40" x 40"; bottom: Laura Splan, *Blood Scarf*, 2002, chromogenic prints on aluminum, 24" x 20", at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Santa Rosa.

Nathan Lynch's installation in the museum's Passage Gallery was funny and lighthearted, adding wit to the mix and credence to the argument that the adjunct CCA instructor may be the West's brightest young conceptualist since Charles Linder. For *Sweetspot*, Lynch converted the difficult space into a clubby sportsman's lounge, bedecking it with tweaked taxidermy including an elk head sculpted of raw lambswool, minnow trophies, wooden duck necks, and cotton puff "flowers" sewn in cellophane. For the opening, Lynch served beer (on crosshair-motif coasters) from the rough-hewn bar.

With its sly reversal of macho morality and subtle commentary on our failed connections to nature, *Sweetspot* complemented *SubAnatomy's* keen observations about our connections to ourselves. Both touched essential facets of contemporary art—the parodic and the personal, the public and private—balancing one another and making the viewer grin and ponder within the same show. In the end, both were about guts: as entrails, as moral fiber, as courage to look more closely at a body, a person, a creature, or an issue that intimidates us.

—Colin Berry

SubAnatomy and *Nathan Lynch: Sweetspot* closes July 31 at the Museum of Contemporary Art at the Luther Burbank Center for the Arts, 50 Mark West Springs Rd, Santa Rosa.

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