

High Voltage:

CA 101 art show is plugged into the AES Power Plant

The AES Power Plant in Redondo Beach will be generating an extra dose of energy this weekend and next. “CA 101,” an annual exhibition now in its fourth year, has again pulled in a multitude of visual artists from up and down the state, and by multitude we’re talking roughly 126 artists and 157 works, with 76 of these artists exhibiting with “CA 101” for the first time.

In addition to paintings, drawings, and photographs, the staples of most gallery or museum shows, “CA 101” features 21 site-specific installations. That’s an impressive number by any standard, and something that needs to be seen in person because catalogues, videos or still images can never do them justice.

This reporter spoke with four of the installation artists at the end of last week while they were still busily at work: Andrea Senn-Kitts, Patty Grau, Lauren Kasmer, and Cie Gumucio. Before shooing me away, this is what they revealed.

Airing dirty laundry

“When I came to look at the space I saw this old steam engine that has that door that looks like an old laundry machine,” says Andrea Senn-Kitts. “I’ve always had this idea of doing an offshore laundering, money laundering sort of project. When I saw this I’m, like, okay, this could be the space for it.”

Her idea behind the work?

“If we have an actual crime scene we mark it, we know exactly where it happens. The offshore crime scenes,



“One and Three, Parallax Views,” by Mike Saijo



Andrea Senn-Kitts.

nobody wants you to know where they happen. The less you know about it, the better this system works.”

At a bit of a distance, “Crime” looks like someone hung up a few items on a clothesline, but a closer look reveals a number of visual puns, including a white collar. Or, as the artist says, “I like to play on words; I like to use text in various materials and unexpected ways.” She incorporates geography as well, to further expose the underlying implications of her theme.

The work is witty, clever, and amusing at the same time.

“It should be a little thought-provoking,” Senn-Kitts adds. “I hope it will start a discussion. A smile, a smirk.”

The Palos Verdes resident has another piece in the show, a bench (and its scenic accompaniment) that’s called “The Slice of Life.” Senn-Kitts is also a furniture designer, works with a lumber company up in Napa, and has a collection of California black walnut furniture. The tree itself, she says, can only be harvested with restrictions, for example if it is being removed for road construction or has fallen on its own accord.

“It’s one of the most durable woods that’s native to California,” she says, “and I try to use the wood in the way it grew. That’s why it’s called ‘The Slice of Life.’ It’s raw-edged. We only use power tools for the initial first run of sanding, and then afterwards it’s all hand-sanded. The only thing to come off is the bark. Other than that we keep the flaws and treat them right so they become almost like an asset.”

Fowl play in paradise

Perhaps I insulted Patty Grau when I asked her for a hamburger, some fries, and a shake, not realizing that the structure she’d built wasn’t meant to sell fast food but was an integral component of a very serious look at an ongoing dilemma between landowners, with two legs, and land dwellers, with two wings.

“The Peacock Blues,” she says, “deals

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with the controversy of the peacocks that are in Palos Verdes. There are people who want them saved and find them to be a glorious part of their neighborhood. Beautiful and glorious.

“And then there are people,” she continues with a frown, “who want them gone, dead. There was a news article where an unidentified man was shooting them from his white Mercedes. He wasn’t even getting out of his dang car. So that piqued my interest: What is this all about?”



Patty Grau

Grau answers her own question. “The nature of man versus nature, basically.”

The fruits of her research point a finger to Lucky Baldwin, whose Victorian-style home is preserved at the Arboretum in Arcadia. Anyone who’s ever wandered the grounds has also encountered the peacocks that live there.

Baldwin knew well-to-do people, such as the Wrigleys and, in Portuguese Bend, Frank Vanderlip.

“He gifted peacocks to all of his rich, wealthy friends,” Grau says. “That started out with about six peacocks up in Portuguese Bend and now they number in the thousands.”

Some people consider the peacocks an invasive species. They’re pretty, but they’re also party birds that make a lot of noise and ignore the 10 p.m. curfew, or any curfew for that matter.

Grau acknowledges that it’s a problem, although she herself lives in Redondo Beach, away from the contentious battle zone. “I’m not on

anybody’s side,” she says; “I don’t know what the right thing to do is. But they’re here to stay.” I’m not sure if she’s referring to people or peacocks, or both. As for her installation itself: “It’s a scene of a crime... and you get to figure out what the crime is.”

Veranda with a view

Feathered creatures are also at the heart of Lauren Kasmer’s installation, but the comparison with “Peacock Blues”

ends right about there—although the interior of the Power Plant could make a nice aviary...

“The name of this installation is called ‘Firebird,’” Kasmer says, “and it’s loosely based on two myths. One is a Russian

to do with the hummingbirds. And so I’m calling them Firebirds as well.”

Kasmer’s site-specific installation is more of an environment, and she’s chosen an ideal location for it.

“This is a magnificent grand space,” she says, “but a different kind of space. It’s not a traditional art gallery. We are in an amazing piece of architecture and history, and I wanted to respond to that. So I created a framework where you could still see the building.”

Exactly. Kasmer has created a fabric-walled room with one side open so that we might feel as if we’re on an enclosed porch or in a cabana overlooking a vista, but with a “landscape” that’s a lot more steampunk than Hudson Valley. And then there’s the room itself, a very domestic-looking interior with plush armchairs, a couch, and a television set.

“Even though it might be unusual for people to encounter a fine art piece with these kinds of variable elements,” she notes, “it’s very specific and very deliberate to the space. It’s my response to the space while still keeping true to the nature of the original intent of the multimedia installation.”

The term “site-specific” isn’t just an artsy-fartsy catchall. Kasmer displayed her



Cie Gumucio

myth; people might be familiar with the Stravinsky ballet. Basically it’s a version of that myth about somebody evil and somebody nice. And then I’ve taken some myths of the Native Americans that have

“Firebird” at El Camino College a couple years ago, and she tailored her concept for the space she was given, a space quite different than the one she enjoys at the *Continued*

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Power Plant.

On the afternoon we spoke, the video component of “Firebird” had not yet been set up, and ditto for the music. “The video has a soundtrack that was a collaboration with a sound engineer and a museum,” she says, “and we took the sounds from nature and made them orchestral. There’s a lot going on when you first come into this space.”

Although it’s an immersive atmosphere, Kasmer doesn’t expect a captive audience.

“The video is situated in such a way that, because it’s almost like a tone poem, you can come in at any point and you’d just be seeing beautiful visuals and hearing beautiful sound.”

Furthermore, Kasmer says, “It’s not that important to me that everybody understand the entire story. What’s lovely is that you can peek in and have a good experience.”

Indeed, and those who linger will be enriched by what they see and hear, and the ideas that “Firebird” evokes.

Nurturing ideas into being

Cie Gumucio has her feet on the ground but her head in the clouds, and there’s no other artist I enjoy hanging out with more because she can be serious

and playful at the same time, with her imagination always on the go. Anybody who saw her recent solo exhibition at Michael Stearns Gallery in San Pedro will know exactly what I mean.

So it wasn’t surprising to encounter her at the AES Power Plant attaching bark and leaves and twigs, along with telling literary excerpts, to one of the big metal green objects that seem to push themselves up from the floor of the gallery. In other words, she’s turned a hard bit of machinery—which sort of resembles a locomotive—into a nest, a place of comfort.

“The idea is,” Gumucio begins, “what is power? Here we are inside of a power plant, but what is power? For me, it’s the power of nurturing something into being, whether it’s a new life or whether it’s a creative idea. And it all needs a soft, beautiful space for that to occur in.”

The green metal monster that Gumucio is covering also has several compartments with hatches, and all of these are now open with large, white, football-shaped objects placed inside. I immediately compare them to turkeys basking in an oven.

“That’s not funny!” Gumucio roars, before laughing. “These are eggs, the beginning of all life; this is the beginning

of anything new.”

“When I see them this big,” I reply, “I think more of dinosaurs.”

“No,” she snaps, with a smile. “Well, because some ideas are big and some ideas are little. I’m just kidding.”

This kind of banter is probably okay with Cie Gumucio because we get along rather well (at least until she reads this), but I don’t want to underplay or sell short the deeper themes that she’s exploring. In fact, some of the work from her recent show—which focused on Jack Kerouac, John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway, and Emily Dickinson—will also be on view here. The literary is very important to her.

“It’s about why stories matter to us,” Gumucio says of her installation. “I feel like they help us know each other.”

And that’s just a taste, a preview of “CA 101,” the 2015 edition, which opens tomorrow evening, Friday, at the AES Power Plant, 1100 N. Harbor Drive, Redondo Beach. It’s free. Hours, Friday, 7 to 10 p.m.; Saturday, 1 to 8 p.m.; Sunday, 1 to 6 p.m. Also next weekend: Friday, August 7, 5 to 10 p.m.; Saturday, August 8, 1 to 8 p.m., and Sunday, August 9, 1 to 6 p.m. Information, (310) 617-2840 or go to friendsredondobeacharts.org.