



**SD Art Prize Mission:
Fusing Energy for San Diego Visual Arts: Mentorship, Education,
Recognition, Collaboration**

ART NOTES

The San Diego Art Prize is a cash grant which recognizes excellence in the visual arts. The prize is dedicated to the idea that the visual arts are a necessary and rewarding ingredient of any world-class city and a building block of the lifestyle of its residents. Conceived to promote and encourage dialogue, reflection and social interaction about San Diego's artistic and cultural life.

Art Notes: Rubén Ortiz-Torres and Tristan Shone

**Notes by Amy Galpin, curator, San Diego Museum Of Art, on
Rubén Ortiz-Torres**

The first time I saw Rubén Ortiz-Torres' work, I was a student at SDSU and I visited *Ultra Baroque: Aspects of Post Latin American Art* at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego. Included in this show were Ortiz-Torres' iconic baseball hats that evolved from everyday objects into powerful statements of our time, most notably an L.A. Kings hat with the addition of the word "Rodney" on the front of the hat over the name Kings and a superimposed police car on the side of the hat served as a reminder of riots that rocked L.A. and as a testament to the enduring power of popular culture. When I relocated to San Diego in 2009, the opportunity arose to interview Ortiz-Torres' for an exhibition, *Behold, America: Art of the United States* from Three San Diego Museums.

As a result of my research in preparation for that interview, work by Ortiz-Torres created from 1984 to 1990 when the artist was living in Mexico City and shortly after he arrived in Los Angeles, were a revelation to me. These paintings, drawings, video, and photography presented Ortiz-Torres' early inner circle of friends and functioned as a historical documentation of an avant-garde group of artists working in Mexico City in the 1980s and in particular revealed the influence of punk culture on Ortiz-Torres. This work is the focus of the current San Diego Museum of Art exhibition, *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*. For me this show portrays the formulation of an artist's identity and offers an opportunity to view the early work of an internationally renowned artist.

In recent months Ortiz-Torres' work has been included in group exhibitions at the Museo Rufino Tamayo and the Museo del Arte Nacional in Mexico City. Beyond his own art, Ortiz-Torres is an author and curator. The fall 2011 exhibition at the Museum of Latin American Art, Mex/L.A.: *Mexican Modernisms*, is



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curated by Ortiz-Torres. Currently, a Professor of Visual Arts at the University of California San Diego, Ortiz-Torres contributes to the local art scene and continues to be an important figure in the art communities of Los Angeles and Mexico City through his diverse body of work.

Notes by Natalie Haddad , art writer on Tristan Shone

In a statement for his work "Aphanisis" in the 2006 exhibition *SouthwestNET: Techno* at the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Tristan Shone describes the highly controlled environment of the high-tech engineer. He ends the passage with a definition of aphanisis, from Freud's biographer Ernest Jones, as "the fear of losing one's sexuality." Shone, whose art and music (as one-man metal band Author & Punisher) is supplemented by his work as a mechanical engineer, has spent enough time in laboratories to know that an aseptic space does nothing more than suspend the volatile forces of life and death—in psychoanalytic terms, of Eros and Thanatos—and Freud well knew that those forces cannot be suspended indefinitely. In a studio in downtown San Diego, Shone builds what he calls drone-machines machines—streamlined objects reminiscent of control panels or laboratory equipment, but seductive; robotic systems designed for *interaction*, not orders. As Author & Punisher, the reciprocity between man and machine reaches its apex in a battering ram of sound that becomes a sculptural medium in itself. This is the sensation of a car crash or a construction site, of technology tearing into its own primal scream; just as the sublimity of a monolith lay in its capacity to crush, the sublimity of noise lay in its capacity to sonically devastate. It's easy to read a narrative of alienation in the drone of earth-shattering metal, but Shone's work offers an alternative narrative, one that annihilates the reactive within destruction and exits on the side of liberation. The artist may be the source of life, but as the machine enters the abyss of existence and affirms itself, its life begins.



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Art Notes: Jay S. Johnson and Adam Belt

Notes by Leah Ollman, art critic, on Jay S. Johnson

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Jay Johnson is a tender tough-guy who deftly fuses contrary impulses in his work, one moment crafting shapes with the sensual minimalism of Brancusi and the next putting those forms to work in a narrative worthy of Buster Keaton. Johnson's work would never get lumped into the identity-art camp, but it thrums with the struggles and gratifications of being human, the negotiations and reckonings that shape a life. He's not an either/or but a both/and kind of guy. The cynicism in his work is quenched by beauty; the complex mess of emotions countered by an exquisite physical purity. It's not surprising that many of his sculptures and installations involve assemblies of objects, repeated disks and orbs, shelves of solid wood vessels, countless compartments. Johnson is interested in archives and the inventory of possibilities afforded by repetition and variation. There is always more than one right answer, no matter that they seem to contradict one another. Simultaneity and multiplicity are key. There is wisdom in his work, along with innocence. Pain, shadowing play. Dissonance resonating within the harmony. Johnson's figures can seem hapless, earnest, uncannily resilient. They can also exude quiet dignity. An air of vulnerability wafts through the work, though it presents formally as cool and contained. There is plenty of whimsy there, but also a wistfulness. Generosity, sheathed within defiance. A controlled sense of grace, in tandem with a jaunty, improvisational spirit. Differences, complements, incongruities all nest snugly within one another. Johnson certainly deserves this prize, and many others.

Notes by Sally Yard, professor, Art History, [University of San Diego](#) on Adam Belt

Over the past decade, Adam Belt has focused his art around the natural forces that course through the universe. In paintings, drawings, sculptures and installations, the evanescent is made palpable.

This inclination was evident in Belt's *The Yearning Bush*, installed in the Mojave Desert in 2004. Composed of copper tubing, a refrigerator compressor, and a battery fueled by the sun, the



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work generated water from traces of vapor that lingered in the air. In its enlistment of elemental materials and transformative energies, *The Yearning Bush* enacted a sort of alchemy. In the series of works on canvas gathered in the exhibition *Condensation* in 2007, a meticulous small drawing of a dam lured the viewer close to each expansive canvas. Studying the graphite image of force and counterforce in the landscape, the viewer discerned an elaborate if near-invisible rendering of the terrain around the dams in white-on-white fields of paint. In *Echo* of 2009, Belt deployed the static or “snow” of television screens to illuminate a miniature wooden replica of the tracery of the rose window depicting Genesis in the Cathedral of St. Denis. Belt’s enlistment of this flickering luminosity was far from flippant—the inchoate static is captured in part from remnant radiation unleashed by the big bang.

Belt’s most recent work ponders perception within the frame of scientific revelation. In *Hubble Ultra Deep Field* of 2011, the artist painstakingly renders in oil glazes the 2004 Hubble image, which is the deepest view of the universe made thus far, reaching back nearly to the big bang. Within the field of the image, both time and space recede, distance measured in billions of light years. Belt’s painting, like the Hubble view, provokes a meditation on the nature of representation. If the *Condensation* images pit muscular manmade architecture in counterpoise to geological flow, then *Echo* and *Ultra Deep Field* reverentially confront primordial energies made visible as light. Insistently material and meticulously crafted, Belt’s works conjure wonder in the face of the ineffable.

Notes by nominator Karen McGuire Director, [William D. Cannon Art Gallery](#) on Adam Belt

One might observe two purposes in Adam Belt’s work. The first is to pay homage to the nature. He does this by combining a reverence for the natural with an awareness of the gulf between the man-made and the environment. The second is to seek new expressions of materials, shape, density and form. I find Adam’s work to be always interesting and fresh. When I was first introduced to his work, he was making a series of large drawings of man-made terrain dams. These exquisitely rendered, detailed drawings were in contradiction to the actual monumental structures that were his source inspiration. That interest in detail and respect for his craft are inherent in all his creations. Continually focused on the exploration and investigation of materials and technologies, in each new work he has the capacity to surprise us.



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