

VISUAL ART

FROM OCEANSIDE TO SAN YSIDRO, ART COULD STILL BE FOUND DESPITE THE LOCKDOWNS

BY SETH COMBS

To say that 2020 was particularly hard on the visual arts community would be an understatement. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many galleries and museums to close while many artists have found themselves out of work or furloughed indefinitely.

Still, troubled times can also serve as a source of inspiration. Artists and institutions did their best to adapt to the “new normal,” while some even managed to thrive in a time of seemingly endless crisis. The resilience of the local visual arts community was on full display year-round. We just had to know where to look.

Taking it to the street

With the outdoors seemingly the only place not closed, San Diego street art and murals appeared to be popping up everywhere. Inspired by the social justice protests after the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, many artists painted tributes throughout the city. Artists Beatriz Milhazes and Marcos Ramirez ERRE unveiled new works as part of the ongoing “Murals of La Jolla” project. And in San Ysidro, five large-scale mu-



HOWARD LIPIN U-T

Griselda Rosas, San Diego Art Prize nominee.

raels were unveiled as part of The Front Arte and Cultura’s “Walls/Muros” program.

Stay in the car

From Encinitas to Barrio Logan, drive-thru art exhibitions, where patrons stay in their car, provided a safer way for the public to view art. Mesa College’s museum studies students curated an excellent exhibition that included large-scale prints hung from a parking lot fence. Lux Art Institute in Encinitas

incorporated site-specific installations and sound art into their annual gala, while IN Gallery provided Barrio Logan residents a similar experience.

A historic prize

The annual San Diego Art Prize made history twice this year. As with many prizes, past nominees and winners had largely been men, so it was refreshing when this year’s nominees were all women. Then, the

four nominees — photographer Alanna Airtam, installation artist Griselda Rosas, multi-disciplinary artist Kaori Fukuyama and Melissa Walter, who specializes in drawings and sculptural works — decided together to share the prize, making a statement about collectivism and competition in art.

Quint returns

When Mark Quint closed his namesake contemporary art gallery in La Jolla in 2016, it was a huge blow to the local scene. And while he kept the momentum going at a new warehouse location in Bay Ho, Quint returned to La Jolla this year with a new location on Girard Avenue. Emphasizing intimate exhibitions (by appointment only) from mid-career artists, the Quint ONE space has already had two excellent showcases from Jean Lowe and Mary Corse.

The Bread rises

Bread & Salt had already solidified itself as one of San Diego’s premier art destinations, but with most people staying home, the folks who run the space in Barrio Logan did their best to satiate quarantined art lovers. In addition to hosting several socially distanced art exhibitions, Bread & Salt hosted dozens of artist Q&As on its Instagram page throughout the year.

A quiet milestone

The 50th anniversary of Chicano Park in Barrio Logan would have been a huge celebration in any other



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Bob Matheny

year, but 2020 certainly was a year like no other. The planned Chicano Park Day in April was postponed indefinitely, but this year the park unveiled a stunning 50-foot mural honoring immigrants who have died attempting to cross the border. Galleries and art spaces are still closed, but Chicano Park and the neighborhood itself remain San Diego’s cultural capital.

Making it count

Speaking of important anniversaries, 2020 also marked the centennial of women’s suffrage. Four San Diego institutions — the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, Bread and Salt, San Diego State Art Gallery and Art Produce in North Park — celebrated with a “Get Out the Vote” poster campaign, which featured over 60 posters from female artists displayed throughout the city.

Lux life

Lux Art Institute closed for six months, but reopened for limited viewings in Octo-

ber with a stunning exhibition of works from cross-disciplinary artist Cosmo Whyte and regional artist Beliz Instay. The latter’s ceramics-based work, most of which is made at her ranch in Valle de Guadalupe, explores themes of cross-cultural femininity and identity.

A happy story

The “Sine Kwento: Filipino Stories in Film” exhibition at the Bonita Museum & Cultural Center was initially supposed to include precious film artifacts from the Philippines, but when the pandemic hit, the curators had to adjust the programming. No matter. The exhibition, which opened in November, was still one of a kind and included an interactive art installation of hand-sewn quilts that were used as projection screens for classic and modern Filipino films.

An artful farewell

The San Diego art scene lost two giants this year with the passing of John Baldessari in January and Bob Matheny in June. Together, and along with artists such as Richard Allen Morris and Robert Irwin, they shaped the Southern California conceptual art scene in the ‘60s and ‘70s. Matheny’s memorial service at Bread & Salt, however, was as irreverent and colorful as his storied career, complete with artist tributes and the burying of a coffin containing mementos and art.

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