



Above: Sex is war, or something like that, in Dick Goody's "Gender Issues."
Below: Voyeurs, or lonely city dwellers, in Sean Gallagher's "Ascendants."

Expats on show

BBAC shows artists living away from home

BY ELLEN PILIGIAN

British-born artist Dick Goody takes a shot at Americans in his brightly colored painting, "Sub Urban Vacuum," which features a bimbo behind the wheel of a truck.

"It relates to my anger at people who drive SUVs," says Goody, one of five artists in *Cross Currents*, a new exhibition at the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center (BBAC). "The only time Americans are really honest is when they're in their cars."

In "Potato Madonna," Goody, director of Oakland University's Meadow Brook Art Gallery, debunks the religious Madonna icon. On the painting he writes, "There was a painting once, but all art in this town is regional and I want to be on television."

Goody explains: "We're all stuck in Detroit."

Goody has three other paintings in the show that are equally bold, irreverent and abstruse — and have almost nothing in common with the other artists' works, as diverse in style as they are in subject matter. What unifies the show is that each artist is working away from his or her homeland. Curator and artist Hartmut Austen, who teaches at the BBAC and Wayne State University, conceived the theme after moving from Germany to Detroit in 1998.

"It examines the influence of cross-cultural experience on individual artistic expression," he says.

Or as Goody puts it: "The idea is that we're a bunch of foreigners."

In contrast to Goody's works are the intricately detailed gouache-on-paper paintings of Iranian-born Shiva Ahmadi, whose patterns are accented by metallic gold oil barrels. One painting depicts tiny flowers and birds in a pattern so pleasing it could pass for wallpaper. She incorporates miniature oil barrels that seem to grow like stalks.

"[Oil] is a glory in that it is money and power, but there are also innocent people in Iraq getting killed because of that," says Ahmadi, a graduate student at Cranbrook Academy of Art. "I leave it up to the viewer if it's [oil is] good or bad."

The densely detailed scenes of Sean Gallagher's nine pencil drawings are more emotional. Gallagher was born

in Canada and raised around the world as an army brat, and now lives north of Seattle. His nomadic existence has colored his work.

"That of looking from the outside in, longing for something irretrievably in the past," he says.

In "Ascendants," men in dark suits are perched in a leafless tree facing a facade of windows and brick, watching and waiting for something.



"It's a lot about conforming but not really knowing how to do it," says Gallagher. "You're wondering what's behind the facade. There's really nothing there."

Five cartoonish, pencil-on-wood drawings are by Belgium born Sacha Eckes, who left Detroit in April for San Francisco, just after her *Bay Area Show* debuted 50 Bay Area artists at Detroit's Tangent Gallery (the show is still running). Eckes' works feature a searching character whose form resembles a potato more than it does a human. The character somehow relates to the spectator, drawing empathy and sometimes confusion.

The first work simply asks, "What Else Is There?" The character is decapitated in one drawing, his head lying beside his body. He looks dejectedly downward in another. The viewer empathizes, even wants to comfort the character.

German-born San Franciscan Julia Reuss' more traditional oil-on-canvas paintings feature the series "Solid Beaches," depictions of her 10-year-old daughter and a friend. Based on snapshots, the works feel like frames from a movie, conveying movement and passage of time. Some are close-up, some farther away. Reuss says she's never painted her daughter before.

"I wanted to avoid sentiment," she says of her painting. That goal might explain her palette of somber blues and grays.

Austen hopes the show will mark a "new beginning" for the BBAC's Robinson Gallery, which has always featured more serious work, he says. "We want to put it [the gallery] on the map again."

The show runs through May 21. The BBAC's Robinson Gallery is open Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m.-7 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. The BBAC is located at 1516 S. Cranbrook Road, Birmingham. Call 248-644-0866 or visit www.bbartcenter.org.

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