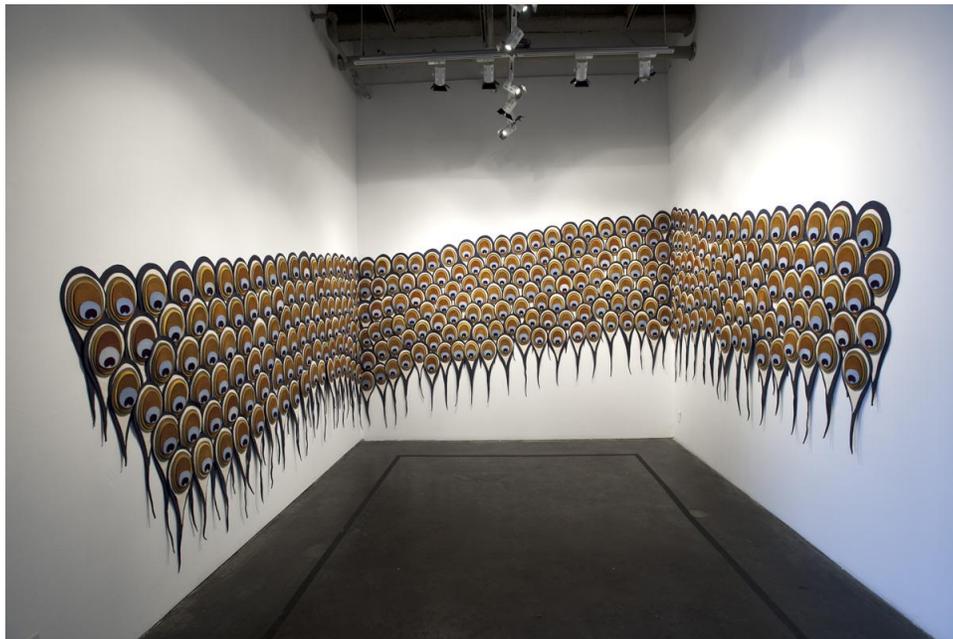


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Warm and fuzzy, and not

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Jennifer Nocon's intriguing site- and city-specific CAF installation touches on the delicate interaction of art and nature

By Josef Woodard
SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

Site-specificity is a common thread in the work of emerging artists who make their way into the Contemporary Arts Forum's corner space Bloom Projects series. But the corner's current occupant, Jennifer Nocon, takes the site-specific notion one step further, making art both about this gallery space and also the strange, gilded city hosting it. Along the way, the artist touches on a recurring motif in her art—the intrigues of nature, as transformed into her particular artistic/conceptual terms.

Intrigued by and processes found in nature, Nocon has created at CAF a warm, fuzzy, obsessive and ultimately not-so-fuzzy installation based on a fish species she discovered at Montecito's eccentric wonderland, Lotusland. No doubt, this particular artist was more bedazzled than most upon visiting Madame Gana Walska's phantasmagorical estate, especially when she discovered the species that gave her new art work its titled, "Gambusia Affinis Santa Barbara."

Gambusia affinis is often introduced to bodies of water as a ward against mosquitoes, and is in fact also known as the “mosquitofish.” But like other ultimately invasive species of plants and animals that have caused trouble with the area’s ecosystem. It is that invasive, multiplying nature that fascinates Nocon, who poetically replicates the effect with a massive “organism” made of felt, suggesting fish scales, primarily but also eyeballs and an army of spermatozoa.

Nocon’s personal aesthetic cleverly courts opposites. On first impression, we sink into the sensual texture of felt, its soft color palette and discernible evidence of influence from artists as diverse as Henri Rousseau and Lucas Cranach. But darkness comes this way as well, as she conveys a sense of domination and even cancerous mutation.

Outside the CAF, in its Glass-box showcase, Nocon has filled the display with rainbow-colored, seaweed-like felt streamers, again evoking both a gentle and claustrophobic aura. Nocon’s work involves a repetitive, hypnotic and obsessive process and result. She’s got her work cut out for her, so to speak. In the end, “*Gambusia Affinis Santa Barbara*” is a bizarre, comforting and vaguely creepy piece of work. An off synthesis of ideas and emotions comes to roost, no doubt fulfilling the artist’s intentions.



ART REVIEW

**JENNIFER NOCON,
'GAMBUSIA AFFINIS SANTA
BARBARA'**

When: through May 24

Where: Contemporary Arts Forum,
653 Paseo Nuevo

Hours: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday

Information: 966-5373,

www.sbcaf.org
