
LAS VEGAS SUN

VISUAL ARTS:

Las Vegas in transformation

Video installations, drawings and backlit transparencies explore ever-changing valley



COURTESY OF CATHERINE BORG

“Self-tending” is a stop-motion animation in which clear blocks, cast by the artist, build and unbuild themselves, suggesting the next development in the field of high-end destinations.

By [Kristen Peterson](#)

Thu, Nov 13, 2008 (2 a.m.)

Architecture on the Las Vegas Strip is akin to an old-style variety show. Acts appear, perform to great applause, then quickly scuttle away, making room for another bedazzling performance.

This constant swapping in and out of our ephemeral landmarks is perfectly (and somewhat humorously) represented in Catherine Borg’s one-minute digital video titled “Self-tending.”

The silent, continuously looping video of animated blocks forming into different architectural structures moves at the pace of a magic show streaming from one fanciful configuration to the next — each configuration posing briefly as if to say “ta-da!” before disassembling.

It’s the tidy and condensed comic relief to the otherwise meditative narrative of Las Vegas transformation that dominates “Untitled,” Borg’s solo show featuring video installations, drawings and backlit transparencies at the Contemporary Arts Center, on display through Nov. 26.

Borg grew up in the Bay Area and spent six years in New York City and New Jersey before moving to Las Vegas in 2004 with her husband, artist Stephen Hendee.

Her artwork centers on her interest in the way architecture “structures our days and memories.” Las Vegas has been as much about architecture as about gaming, and its stories are often told via the buildings that are and are not here. We’re famous for reinvention through brilliant facades.

Borg looks beyond the magic curtain in this exhibit — particularly in her seven-minute, 18-second video, “Adventure Non-fiction: Tracking the Void.” The triptych of silent videos runs as continuous loops and will be featured in a December show at San Francisco’s Museum of Modern Art.

One video pans the Queen of Hearts casino after it had been closed, boarded up and wrapped with a chain-link fence. It surveys its torn awnings, abandoned signs and drab cinder block walls.

Another is shot from a car moving along the Strip, past the new and old casinos, construction, streams of tourists, souvenir shops, themed landscapes, crowds, condos and lighted trees.

A third video moves stealthily around an urban ruin that served various purposes, from casino to farmer’s market, in Commercial Center. Dead plants and weeds dot the unused parking lot. Boarded doors and paint blotches tell the story of the building shaped like a temple with sloped concrete walls.

The exhibit, much like the city, is all about motion and transformation — animated blocks or the bumping, pulsating of reconfigured neon, bulbs and buildings in “Experimental Phantom Area,” a 2006 collaboration with artist Amy Yoes that presented as an installation via the 15 monitors at the Peppermill Fireside Lounge.

Borg’s “I only have stars for you; you only hold stars for me” runs just over 10 minutes and details the implosion of the Stardust via a seemingly random narrative by revelers observing, mourning and celebrating the event.

Unique in this show is a series of Borg’s drawings that give a hint to her thought process.

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