

# LAS VEGAS THE INTERSECTION OF ARTS // ENTERTAINMENT // CULTURE + EVERYTHING ELSE THAT MATTERS™ WEEKLY

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### Contemporary art—in 3D!

December 13, 2007

by [Susanne Forestieri](#)

#### CAC's new exhibit takes sculpture into the future



For millennia, sculpture—whether of man-god Egyptian pharaohs, muscular Greek athletes or unearthly European Madonnas—was primarily figurative and carved in stone, marble or wood. In cutting-edge contemporary art, figuration and traditional materials have almost completely disappeared, but that doesn't stop the 13 young Las Vegas artists gathered for the Contemporary Arts Collective's *3Dementia* exhibition from seriously contemplating the human condition.

Nor does their youth.

Although all the works are highly conceptual, the exhibition offers a panoply of different approaches and media, which can be divided into three categories: nonfigurative works, where the presence of absent figures is implied; works that feature isolated or detached body parts; and fantastic or kitschy hybrid creatures.

Of the nonfigurative pieces, Brandon Davey's "home for the holidays" made the strongest impression on me. What looks like an ordinary white door and wreath delivers a shock when you circle to the back and find the wood surface covered with white satin fabric gathered and sewn to look like the lining of a casket. Returning to the front for another look at the odd wreath, I noticed it was completely fabricated from sergeant's stripes and seemed to be a sober look at the real cost of war.

Justin Crabtree's former job as an embalmer must have imbued him with an awareness of death unusual in a young person except in a war zone. His mixed-media piece "waste lamps" consists of gold-colored aluminum mailboxes filled with different lengths of empty fluorescent tubes; the whole effect is reminiscent of a pipe organ. Faint traces of hand-drawn apartment numbers on the well-worn boxes are reminders of lives effaced by time, and light flickering across the glass tubes enhances the effect of time passing.

Light and reflection are major components of Brent Sommerhauser's installation "still can't keep," where one corner of the gallery is heaped with small mirrors mounted on cardboard the size and shape of Polaroids, like so many discarded memories. The light bouncing off the mirrors creates delicate tracteries on the wall, the evanescence of which amplifies one's sense of life's impermanence. Light, shadow and visual perception are important concepts in R.C. Wonderly's installation. A portion of the gallery is isolated by a wall, and that area of the floor is covered in vinyl tile. An irregularly shaped vinyl box sits squarely in the middle. It seems to cast a shadow, but that is only an illusion. The cruciform shape of the shadow doesn't fit the shape of the box and is really made of dark plywood. The work is simple, yet more unsettling as I realized how easily I was deceived.

Chris Bauder's "untitled (green green)" is deceptive in another way. Three low glass "tables" are set as if for a tea party, but the latex-paint-filled objects are really witty simulacra of sexual body parts. Reacting to the sexual energy of Las Vegas, Bauder says that "the transition from a hard material to soft was a

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### Recent stopover: Tool at the Joint, May 5, 2006

"[Frontman Maynard James] Keenan has also loosened up a little since the band's last tour, hitting the stage shirtless, sporting a mohawk, aviator sunglasses and, later, a cowboy hat, and offering a couple of requisite Vegas jokes. "Even though the rest of the band barely moved, the performance was powerful and tight, showcasing drummer Danny Carey's precision and [Adam] Jones' layered guitar mastery. Songs that sound almost antiseptic on record came across as raw and visceral, even when they went on for 10 minutes. The selection was light on early material but featured enough hits ("Sober," "Aenema," "Schism") mixed with newer tracks to satisfy die-hard and casual fans alike. It was a triumphant return."



smaller trompe l'oeil work, "mask," features a long, extended tongue emanating from what looks like a googly eyed WWI gas mask, complete with "leather" straps and "metal" components all made of clay.

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Raj Medhekar is interested in other body parts—bones—not as structural support but plausibly as mankind's first weapon. Medhekar, exploring human aggression, notes that tools have evolved, but we haven't. In "arsenal" and "arsenal (upgrade)," femoral bones and Sony Playstation controllers are cast in bronze and aluminum, then placed in real rocket and ammo boxes. Medhekar hopes to draw viewers' attention to war, not only as a constant in human history but also as a lucrative endeavor.

Erin Stellmon depicts another growth industry, the implosion of hotel/casinos to make way for newer and bigger ones. Using her signature style of torn, twisted and painted paper mounted on wood and foam, Stellmon perfectly captures the scene of crumbling concrete and clouds of dust. I'm not aware of anyone using paper and paint quite the way she does—to achieve dimension and vividly capture dynamic events in a still medium.

Curator Miguel Rodriguez, a graduate of UNLV and a ceramic artist himself, has often organized exhibitions to showcase the work of others; but this is his first curatorial foray into the arts district. He's a man with a mission—to promote three-dimensional art. The high level of craftsmanship and conceptual sophistication of the work confirms he's off to a splendid start.

### 3Dementia

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Through December 29

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