

# Bay area's rising star explores what we see, how we see it

**Bee Art Correspondent**

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The process of seeing – not just what we see but how we see it – is the subject of Gay Outlaw's exhibition at the Center for Contemporary Art, Sacramento.

Titled "The Velocity of Ideas," the show gives us glimpses into a fascinating mind that plays with ideas of the real and the illusory.

Outlaw, a Bay Area artist with a growing national reputation, explores the tension between what we see and what we think we see in a series of cubic sculptural forms pierced with cylindrical holes. These Camocubes, as she calls them, resemble at first glance blocks of Swiss cheese. On closer inspection, they are complex constructions that fool the eye and disturb the senses.

Built around a void, the geometric forms are perforated with holes, through which at the proper angle you can see. But they are also printed with photographs of holes in a pattern-on-pattern fashion that disorients the process of vision. Done in primary colors – red, blue and yellow – they are elegant conceptual objects that confound our senses and our minds.

In contrast to the openwork lattices of the cubes are a pair of bronze sculptures low on the floor titled "Ovals." They might be the holes in the cubes made solid. These mysterious pieces are quite beautiful and invite both aesthetic and intellectual contemplation.

"Jersey Twist," made of wool felt, is a witty piece in the form of a low brick wall that is warped in a curve. It violates our expectations of the form, being a solid and presumably heavy object that is actually quite light and a "hard" object that is, in fact, soft.

"Crate Wave," a large piece made of cast paper, is the pièce de résistance. An undulating wave made of giant egg cartons spreads on the floor and crawls up a wall in a corner of the gallery.

One immediately thinks of Hokusai's "Great Wave," but then the piece asserts its own complexity. Painted in tones of blue in fanciful patterns, the cups or pockets of the crate take on a life of their own, suggesting associations with ceramic Delft ware and Japanese prints. It's a candidate for the most fascinating piece I have seen this year.

Accompanying these three-dimensional works in the gallery's front room are a series of small still-life paintings of the artist's studio populated with her sculptures. Actual photographs of some of the objects are incorporated seamlessly into the compositions so that you look and look again to see what is painted and what is photographed.

Again, there is an interplay between the real and the fictive and a tension between abstraction and illusion. These are lively and quite lovely small works that document the velocity with which Outlaw's ideas form.

In the gallery's back room, a long table stretches diagonally across the room. It is set with more of Outlaw's sculptures, among them representations of a wave in bronze and a teardrop that looks like it is made of pure translucent amber. Both are beautiful, as is a cube for Donald Judd in which some of the cylindrical holes meet to form hearts in a love letter of sorts.

Wonderfully wrought are a pair of small pieces primarily made of wood. "Untitled (Stuffed Cube)" is a fascinating Escher-like illusion that combines traditional parquet inlay with cylindrical holes made of ceramic. "Spice Box Jig" is a wooden box, perforated with holes, that opens to reveal an intricately carved cube made of cinnamon. Taking off from the traditional Jewish spice box, the piece was made for an exhibition at the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco.

Eminently entertaining and engrossing, "The Velocity of Ideas" will keep you thinking long after you have left the show. Outlaw is definitely a star on the rise.

## **GAY OUTLAW: THE VELOCITY OF IDEAS**

What: In the work of this Bay Area star on the rise, you'll find an interplay between the real and the fictive and a tension between abstraction and illusion.

When: Noon-5 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday, 6-9 p.m. Second Saturday, through May 15

Where: Center for Contemporary Art, 1519 19th St., Sacramento.

Cost: Free

Information: (916) 498-9811, [www.ccasac.org](http://www.ccasac.org)

Of note: Don't miss the chance to go next door to the center to see Gene Oldfield's cybernetic sculptures and mathematical formulae. A polymath who has made robots for many years, Oldfield is a Sacramento treasure. His current show at Axis Gallery, 1517 19th St., includes a bicycle bot and many other fanciful machine creatures as well as elegant equations hanging on the walls. Out of sight for many years, Oldfield comes back stronger than ever. His return to the Sacramento art scene is a welcome event.

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