

Monterey County Life & Times

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ART COMES TO LIFE WITH VITALITY AND DETAIL

SUSAN MANCHESTER OPENS MONTEREY NOW SHOW

By LISA CRAWFORD WATSON
Herald Correspondent

When she was small, Susan Manchester wondered how angels' wings were attached. It wasn't so much about the angels as it was a driving curiosity about

how things work, a desire to understand what she was seeing, so she could draw it. As an artist, she still is intrigued by how the elements of her subjects interact to result in a dynamic image. Because she studies the interplay of shape and form, of

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Courtesy Susan Manchester

SMALL ART A BIG DEAL AT MONTEREY MUSEUM OF ART SHOW

By LISA CRAWFORD WATSON
Special to The Herald

This year, folks really are skipping gifts for the naughty and, in some cases, also the nice. Families are forgoing the annual holiday open house and funneling the savings into donations for those who need it more. The spiraling economy has

us paying attention to what we spend and how — as we still try to acknowledge loved ones in this season of giving. Some are setting limits. Except for the dollar bins at Target, those \$5 and \$10 and \$25 limits don't go very far. Unless you go to the Monterey Museum of Art, where a

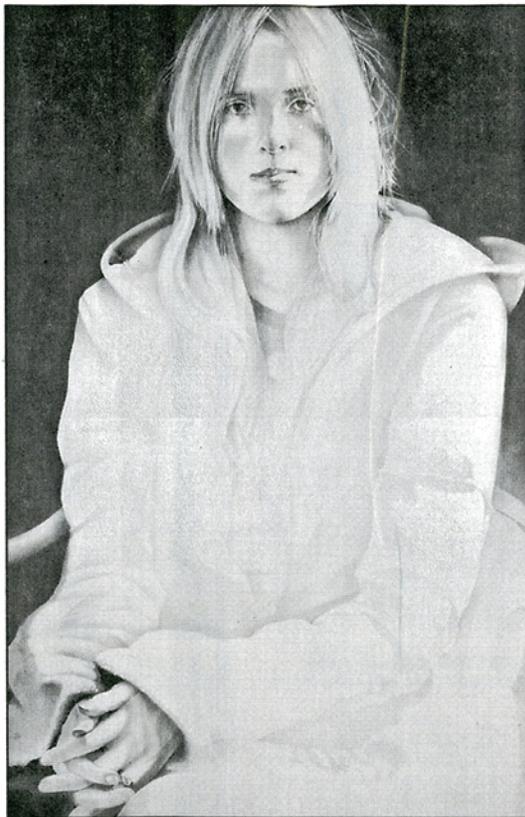
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LIFE & TIMES



Courtesy Susan Manchester
"Persimmon Tree Chronicles #9," 2007, conte crayon with graphite on paper.



Courtesy Susan Manchester
"Equipoise," 2008, graphite on paper.

Manchester

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light and shadow, of substance and space, her artistry reveals an intimacy about the subject the viewer might miss if Manchester had not understood it herself. It's about looking and seeing and learning how to draw the details, which Manchester has been doing her whole life. Some would call her work precise, but only if focusing on the precision of pencil strokes, an exacting draftsmanship that results in supreme accuracy. Others will respond to the softness of shadow, the hope, the anticipation, the vitality in a face, a figure, a flower. Manchester's work is intense yet delicate, converging strength and fragility, and subtly reminding us of the power of both. Hence the seduction of a seedpod.

This Thursday, Manchester's work will be both honored and exhibited at the Monterey Museum of Art through Monterey NOW, an invitational exhibition focusing on contemporary artists residing in Monterey County. Each episode of the biannual series presents the most recent body of work by a single living artist in our midst. "Manchester fittingly refers to both the botanical and human drawings as portraits, redefining the traditional art form to encompass not only human likeness," said chief curator Marcelle Polednik, "but also 'various growing beings, interconnected and animated by living energy.' It is this sense of vitality that permeates each composition. "In 'Equipoise,' (this vitality) invigorates the strands of the sitter's hair, adding a frenzied element to the otherwise focused composure of the young girl. Similarly, in Manchester's botanical drawings, such as 'Tulip Free

If you go

- **What:** Monterey NOW exhibition, featuring artist Susan Manchester
- **Where:** Monterey Museum of Art Coburn Gallery, 559 Pacific St., Monterey
- **When:** Opening Reception during Art After Hours, Thursday, Nov. 20, from 5-7 p.m. Exhibition continues through Feb. 22
- **Cost:** Thursday event free; otherwise \$5 general admission; \$2.50 students and military with I.D., free to museum members
- **Contact:** 372-5477

Fall, the flowers and plants exude powerful forces that reveal themselves with the opening of each petal and the contour of each vein." As Manchester draws, her subjects, she explains, "slowly disengage from their outward appearance to reveal their secrets, and these inherent truths become the drawing." The artist tends to work more with tonality than color, employing no more than three subtle shades which enhance but don't confound the image. Although she loves color, it tends to serve as more of a

distracted than a vehicle for her expression. "I use color as a tincture," she said, "to suggest there is more color than there is in the drawing. If I work in black-and-white all the time, my drawings might slip into the zone of looking like photographs. When a woman in New York insisted my drawing was a photograph, it caused me to question it and move away from getting too polished." Although she has been drawing her whole life, Manchester's formal education began at the University of California-Santa Barbara. She then convinced her father she needed to go to Florence, the "cradle of the Renaissance" where, she has said, she wanted to "assess the ancients." "Additional training at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence proved instrumental," said Polednik, "in charting Manchester's lifelong pursuit. During this Italian sojourn, Manchester spent mornings at the Uffizi Gallery Library of Prints and Drawings where she seized the opportunity to study original works by Renaissance masters such as Michelangelo and Andrea del Sarto. "An afternoon printmaking course under the guidance of Giorgio Morandi — whose delicate still lifes reflect a keen

sense of observation, sensitivity to form and reserved use of color — provided another source of inspiration. Though he depicts humble, ordinary objects, Morandi endowed simple forms with nobility and integrity — a sensibility that continues to guide Manchester's own approach." The opening of Monterey NOW coincides with Art After Hours, the up-tempo happy hour hosted every third Thursday at the Monterey Museum of Art from 5-7 p.m.