Leon Dabo's Secret Garden

ARTIST'S FLORAL PASTELS, HIDDEN FOR DECADES, RESURFACE AT SULLIVAN GOSS GALLERY

By Daniel Kepl, News-Press Correspondent

Leon Dabo: 'Toutes Les Fleurs'
When: *Aug. 2-Oct. 28*
Where: *Sullivan Goss An American Gallery,*
7 E. Anapamu Street
Cost: *Free*
Information: *730-1460, sullivangoss.com*

Leon Dabo was one of the most famous American painters of his era, but his popularity has been lost to history for the past several decades. Maybe that will change soon. A prolific landscape artist in the tonalist manner — muted, atmospheric — the French-born master enjoyed a comfortably busy and famous career in New York City and Paris from the 1890s to the 1950s, particularly the period from around the turn of the last century to 1917 when America, including Dabo, became distracted by the war to end all war.

Leon Dabo exhibited more than 700 paintings in New York City and other major American cities, including Los Angeles, during the heyday of his career, and maintained an active studio in Manhattan. In addition to his landscape work, which made him famous, he was a prolific muralist, painting dozens of religious subjects on canvas for churches and synagogues throughout New York City and it's boroughs. A treasure trove, much of this art languishes still, forgotten under layers of grot.

Leon Dabo's secret passion, floral pastels, which he quietly chalked, then stashed in dark corners of his studio because such work was considered unmanly in the age of Titanic, were discovered by a curator in 1933 while scouring Dabo's studio, pulling works for a show.

Out of the closet at last, these floral subjects revealed Leon Dabo as a progressive colorist. The bouquets he created in his mind were abstract representations — not botanically accurate floral realizations. Vases floated surreally, and slightly off center, in moody, amorphous, hues. More importantly, these pastels jumped off the page in explosive riots of color.

By the end of his life, Dabo's pastels, and most of his oeuvre, had fallen in popularity. The artist's surviving work was stored at an upstate New York farmhouse after the artist's death at 96 in 1960. Enter Frank Goss, of Santa Barbara's Sullivan Goss An American Gallery.

Since his discovery and purchase of the Leon Dabo estate, Mr. Goss has become an authority on the painter. A book of Dabo's

Sullivan Goss photos

'Snapdragons'

sketches has already been published, and a documentary film is in the works.

The Sullivan Goss show, including a couple of pieces loaned by private collectors to flesh out the collection, is entitled "Toutes Les Fleurs," and runs through Oct. 28. Featured are 18 of the artist's florals, 14 pastels and 4 oils, most dating from 1900 to 1916 and one pastel seascape.

The show is positioned at Sullivan Goss in a manner that offers a pleasant walkabout of the artist's secret garden. For contrast, and as a reminder of Leon Dabo's fame as a landscape painter, one of his tonal pastels, "Seascape," hangs powerfully but discretely, separate from the floral collection.

As one enters the gallery, the most recent work in the Dabo show "Vase Blanc" grabs attention immediately, even though it is hung at the end of a narrow stretch of corridor immediately to the right of the gallery entrance. The medium is oil on canvas and the picture is a conflation of two of the artist's lifelong excellences.

As the viewer turns to exit the narrow passageway to enter the main gallery, there is little choice but to study, close up, a row of smaller oil florals on various surfaces including board, paperan, and canvas. A favorite in the grouping for its subtlety is "Untitled Deep Red Floral."

Rounding the corner, a viewer finds the remainder of the collection, all pastels, hung in a comforting boudoir ambiance, enhanced by focused direct lighting on each picture, perfectly highlighting these rapturously colorful, yet intimate images.

"Snapdragons" is an exuberance of long-stemmed color, a suspension of vertical action in space (the vase is not visible). The work's wonderfully sunny skewers of yellow and grassy green, are punctuated by vibrant dashes of red, orange and peach, supported by confidant stems in shades of lavender,

'La Vie en Rose'

'Abstraction Mlancolique'

turquoise, and dark navy. The piece is a magnificent example of Dabo's mastery of pastel technique.

As its title makes clear, "La Vie en Rose" is hard to miss, for it is ablaze in various hues of red, yellow and deep orange.

Best in show to this viewer's eye for its gossamer delicacy and transparent coloration "Les Fleurs Fantmes" might have been drawn quickly over a short period of time. The pastel on paper is essentially a line drawing in colored chalk. Even the squat, blue/black vase is sketched incorporeally, background color easily seen between its vertical patterning. Surely this picture represents best, the sweet frailty of "Toutes Les Fleurs."

Painting, Dismantling, Reshaping

"HISTORY =ING": ANNIE LAPIN'S PROVOCATIVE INSTALLATION ART PROJECT

By Josef Woodard,
News-Press Correspondent

Annie Lapin, "History =ing"
When: *through September 30*
Where: *Contemporary Arts Forum,*
653 Paseo Nuevo
Hours: *11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, noon to 5 p.m. Sunday*
Information: *966-5373, www.sbcaf.org*

Over in the "Bloom Series" nook of the Contemporary Arts Forum at the moment, we find further adventures and tasty conceptual mind-games in the line of site-specific and installation art duty, courtesy of Annie Lapin's "History =ing" presentation. As a title, "History =ing" is more than idle wordplay, as it alludes to the aspects of memory and remnants in Ms. Lapin's work. As a bonus, the intellectual underpinnings of her art blend nicely with a sense of visceral fun-housing. The L.A.-based artist makes the "Bloom" corner a happy place to hang out in for a spell.

Presentation and installation are the operative terms here, versus exhibition as such, for this synthesized offering of deconstructed notions of painting, as noun and verb, and alteration and incorporation of

Wayne McCall photo

'History =ing II'