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### AROUND THE GALLERIES

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By David Pagel, Special to The Times

### June 6, 2008

#### A light touch and simple images

**Valérie Jacobs'** finely detailed works on paper and canvas reveal that art made with a light touch and a heavy heart is far more resonant than any made with a heavy hand. At Bert Green Fine Art, 20 understated images neither clamor for your attention nor aggressively mess with it once they get it.

Instead, Jacobs' supple pictures swim into focus like daydreams that leave you wondering where they came from but knowing right where they take you: back to a familiar world that seems different because you see it with fresh eyes.

Jacobs mixes metaphors as deftly as she mixes media, combining oil paint, pastel crayon, ink, pencil, etching and just a bit of collage.

The works describe simple things, such as old-fashioned hats, boxing gloves and scampering rats, as well as fanciful figures, such as Thai deities, mischievous monkeys and ghost demons.

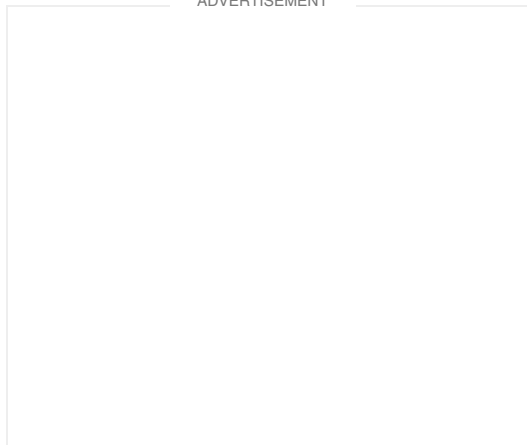
The best images are the simplest and the most complicated.

A series of seven little drawings, each featuring a common object or two, transforms ordinary things into intriguing talismans, with just the right combination of film noir mysteriousness and everyday plainness. The complex compositions invite viewers to forget about messages, their incompatible elements making poetic rather than logical sense.

Jacobs stumbles when her works convey direct messages about the danger of beauty and the trickery of images. When she avoids conventional symbols, her works lure viewers into a world where everything is just what it is and much more.

Bert Green Fine Art, 102 W. 5th St., (213) 624-6212, through June 22. Closed Sundays and Mondays. [www.bgfa.us](http://www.bgfa.us).

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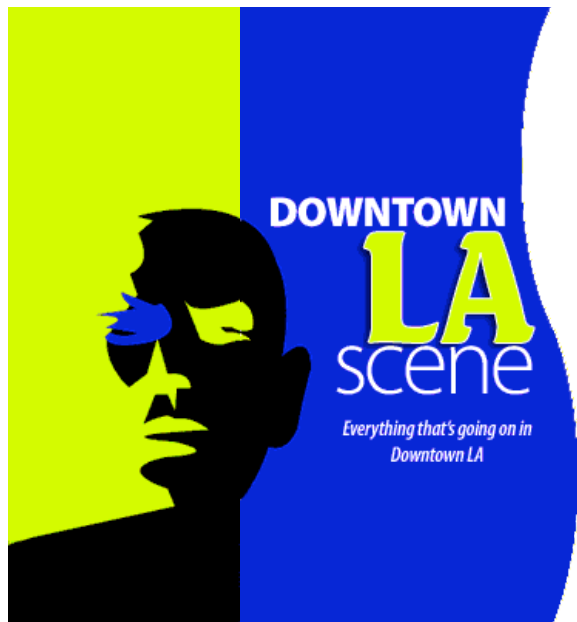


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## Going Into Detail



### Bert Green Fine Art Presents Two Solo Shows of Intricate Thoughtfulness

by Julie Riggott

No one can accuse Jeff Gillette or Valerie Jacobs of making rushed, shallow art. The two artists with solo shows at Bert Green Fine Art both have a keen

eye for detail and an even sharper wit.

Gallery owner and curator Bert Green planned the exhibits as two entirely separate shows with “no deliberate connections,” but the artists’ paintings and drawings harmonize in a conversation about aesthetics and society that is difficult to overlook.

The paintings in Gillette’s *Desert Interventions* capture real scenes of natural beauty, but instead of editing out eyesores like an unsightly pile of rusted metal and debris by the roadside, Gillette makes it the focal point - in effect ruining a beautiful landscape like the thoughtless human intruder before him.

Everything from “No Trespassing” signs and cars (evidenced by a dead rabbit on the road) to discarded tires and other detritus encroach on beautiful mountains rising up from vast stretches of shrubs, rocks and sand.

“I either painted stuff as I saw it (dumps and plastic bags in the wind) or I arranged stuff in them (adding plastic in the wind, setting up frames of discarded, dilapidated furniture to see through) or I created composites of two separate scenes,” the Orange County schoolteacher explained in an email.

Gillette paints in the plain air

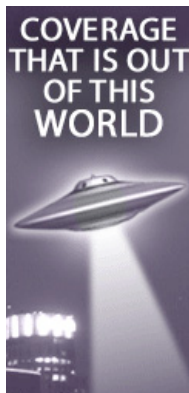


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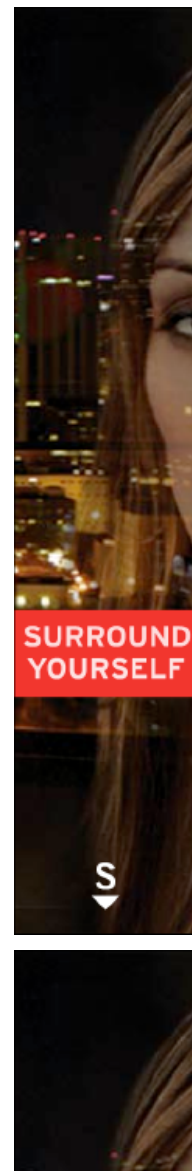
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tradition and works quickly to capture the light and shadows in the desert. His palette is seemingly infinite.

The studio work is much more meticulous. "I spend weeks sometimes, tightening up the desert ground, with the plants, rocks and twigs," he said.

In some of the "interventions," Gillette arranged boulders to look like animals, smashed his iMac computer ("We've all been angry enough at technology to do this for real, haven't we?"), or added his own artwork to the landscape.

"My most ambitious piece was 'Sign Sign' where I painted a 4-by-8-foot piece of plywood and stuck it in an empty billboard frame on the old highway 20 miles south of Vegas. I put it up during the cover of night, wearing all black, and dodged cars going by, jumping behind bushes," he recalled.

In his most incongruous and playful image of man's intrusion on nature, Gillette put a painted canvas of SpongeBob SquarePants at the site of artist Michael Heizer's "land art." "In the case of SpongeBob, I chose him for instant recognition," he said. "Maybe the jarring displacement of an annoying, high-pitched-voiced cartoon character into a terrain that is almost devoid of sound was part of the reason. Maybe knowing this character would either be blasted by beer-swilling gun enthusiasts, blown away by the wind or in the case of 'Sponge/Heizer South,' be buried by tons of rock, is a way of venting my anger."

#### Mesmerizing Illusions

Jacobs' detailed paintings and drawings have a similarly surreal feel. Her oil and acrylic "Where the Money Is, There Lies the Heart" is layered with symbolism. A multi-armed deity dangles computer mice, as rats drop coins from ruby slippers and beastly human creatures (also featured in two "Hungry Ghosts" drawings) watch the rain of money.

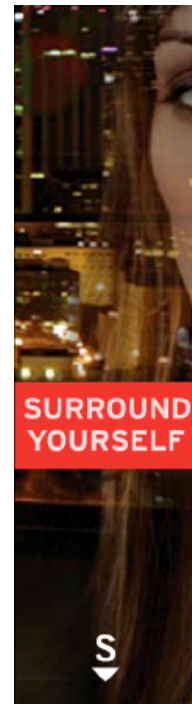
Most of the works on display by the septuagenarian San Francisco artist are graphite drawings, in which she achieves an extraordinary photorealism. The storm-tossed water, boxing gloves and rose-colored glasses in "Untitled Self-Portrait" are mesmerizing illusions, appearing more real than it would seem possible with the medium.

Jacobs said she does research before putting pencil to paper and sometimes makes her own models. That research packs her works with meaning. More accurately, she intends for them to be "visual metaphors": "images that are available to us from history, culture, politics and media."

A mosquito ready to draw blood and magnified many times beyond its true size holds an eerie sense of foreboding, as does a gorgeous painting of a pink rose against a background dripping with dark, almost black paint ("Chicago Peace Rose 1945"). An insect lurks behind a petal.

"The insect is a cockroach, a pest that is from a period between 354 and 295 million years ago," Jacobs explained. "It is very long-lasting, destructive and invasive."

"Chicago Peace Rose 1945" was the first in a series of drawings and paintings exploring insinuations of violence. In her work, the rose appears as a symbol of peace, and the fedora, co-opted by Chicago gangsters like



Al Capone, recurs as a symbol of corruption. Jacobs explained her inspiration: "Peace has been struggling for a long time."

Jeff Gillette: Desert Interventions and Valorie Jacobs: New Paintings, Drawings and Prints continue through June 29. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday noon-6 p.m. Bert Green Fine Art, 102 W. Fifth St., (213) 624-6212 or [bgfa.us](http://bgfa.us).

Contact Julie Riggott at [julie@downtownnews.com](mailto:julie@downtownnews.com).

Published on: May 16, 2008

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# VALERIE JACOBS and JEFF GILLETTE

May 8 - June 30, 2008 at [Bert Green Fine Art](#), Downtown

*by Ray Zone*

This tandem show at first glance might seem an unlikely pairing. However, these two bodies of work reveal some compelling affinities. Jeff Gillette is a gifted plein air painter who takes the California desert as his subject and context. His paintings have a deceptive realism that mirrors the quiet beauty of the desert. But this figurative celebration of nature is invested with ironic commentary. Using what he calls "interventions," Gillette depicts encroachments both ecological and cultural upon the natural environment.



Jeff Gillette, "Whales," 2007,  
acrylic on canvas, 20 x 60".



Jeff Gillette, "Bell Mountain," 2007,  
acrylic on canvas, 20 x 60".



Jeff Gillette, "Sponge Heizer South," 2007,  
acrylic on canvas, 20 x 36".

In "Bell Mountain," for example, he mountain of the same name is painted with quiet dignity below a serene blue sky in a verdant panorama. It would be an idyllic view except for the fact that in the lower left corner we see a variegated mound of trash with shelving, empty buckets and wood planks scattered amid other human rubble that appears to have been at the location for quite some time. Nature takes no notice of this spoilage, but the viewer of the painting might. The matter of fact presentation by Gillette of the indignity of such debris reinforces the power of a political statement free of hyperbole.

The painting "Whales" also includes human debris in the desert vista. But just behind the scattered trash are piles of rocks that the artist has rendered as whales swimming in the variegated scene. Gillette has also made similar interventions in other locations to create "big foot" cartoon characters out of rocks on site before making the plein air painting. Call this strategy "humor versus despair" if you will, but it's a way to allude to the human encroachment on the natural setting without invoking volatile feelings.

In "Sponge Heizer South" Gillette depicts artist Michael Heizer's large earthwork "Double Negative" (1969) in the Nevada desert gashed out by a bulldozer. In the trench, however, Gillette inserts the "Sponge Bob" cartoon character as if to humorously suggest it is he who has made the trench. As a satirical answer to Heizer's monumental earthwork, Sponge Bob may be seen as a representative in miniature of the delights of popular culture, a co-habitant of the common sphere of even high conceptual art.

The paintings and drawings of Valerie Jacobs are more subtle in their observations and paradoxes. You have to wait for the realizations of their irony to dawn on you. "Chicago Peace Rose 1945" might at first look be a botanical work of simple beauty. But wait, there's an insect on a petal off to the side making its way to the heart of the rose. No human intervention is necessary here for the artist to drive her ironic commentary. Nature itself can be destructive of simple beauty.



Valerie Jacobs, "Chicago Peace Rose 1945," 2008, oil and acrylic on canvas, 30 x 30".

In "Concertina" a spiraling web of razor wire is painted white against a pure azure. The wire circles upon itself and, in its musical configuration suggests to this writer the other type of concertina, a hand-held instrument similar to an accordion. Of course, no human hands can touch this material without suffering injury. Pondering the title and looking at the image, one is disturbed by the possibility of this ironic juxtaposition.



Valerie Jacobs, "Concertina," 2008, oil on canvas, 30 x 30".

Jacobs makes delicate graphite drawings that are highly realistic. One, "Untitled (Mosquito)," depicts an extreme close-up of a mosquito feasting with its lance of a proboscis deep in human skin. Quiet intricacy is beautifully rendered here but painful to consider. As with other works of Jacobs' in this show, the delicacy of the style stands in counterpoint to the ultimate effect of the image.



Valerie Jacobs, "Untitled (Mosquito)," 2007, graphite on paper, 8 1/2 x 6 1/2".

Representational art in paintings and drawing for quite some time now has subsumed the lessons of modernism, conceptual art, performance art and post-modernism. Figuration may well subvert itself, question and reinvent itself as it builds new forms of paradox and irony that are quite subtle. Such antinomies are invested in the art of Gillette and Jacobs. Giving voice to sensibilities that are distinctly of the historical moment, representation continues to be renewed.

