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Pinturas sobre los peligros de la modificación genética



Uno de los óleos de Yagi, que ilustra al humano todavía unido a su pasado de primate (© Sandra Yagi) Ampliar

- Sandra Yagi se acerca a "la frontera entre la humanidad y la naturaleza animal".
- La parte más oscura del ser humano y sus impulsos incontrolables son los temas preferidos por la artista, que auna ciencia y arte.
- Su técnica, similar a la de los maestros clásicos como Tiziano y Caravaggio, se basa en la superposición de capas de óleo y acrílico.

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Diomedes devorado por sus caballos es una interpretación del mito que protagoniza el hombre que, según la mitología griega, reinaba en Bistonia y poseía cuatro caballos **que habían acostumbrado a comer carne humana** para que terminaran con los forasteros. El cruel soberano terminó siendo alimento de sus propios monstruos. "Es una imagen del humano torciendo la naturaleza para un mal fin y provocando su propia destrucción", explica la autora del cuadro.

La artista estadounidense [Sandra Yagi](#) examina la psicología humana y **reflexiona sobre la naturaleza y la ciencia** en pinturas

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que elabora con exquisitos procedimientos clásicos. Los peligros de la modificación genética, la hibridación y el lado más primitivo del ser humano son temas recurrentes en sus obras.

Amante de los animales y de "los bichos de aspecto espeluznante" la artista considera **que la ciencia y el arte se complementan** y se apoyan: "El científico mira a la naturaleza con disciplina, probando hipótesis para obtener conocimiento. El artista puede fijarse en la naturaleza para mejorar su comprensión, más filosófica y subjetiva".

Hace un minucioso estudio de la anatomía, con músculos y estructuras óseas que elabora con acrílico y óleo. En sus obras hay por lo menos **cuatro capas de pintura** que superpone dejando que una se transparente sobre la otra, al modo en que [Tiziano](#) o [Caravaggio](#) dotaban de profundidad a sus cuadros.

La batalla por superar el lado salvaje

Sus creaciones más recientes se acercan a "la delgada frontera entre la humanidad y nuestra naturaleza animal". En el interior de su serie de detallados cráneos hay **reptiles copulando o chimpancés en actitud violenta**. Yagi crea una "anatomía metafórica" para referirse a la violencia, la guerra y la avaricia de los impulsos antepuestos a la racionalidad que hemos conseguido

desarrollar a lo largo de la historia.

La artista ve al ser humano inmerso siempre en la batalla por superar su lado salvaje, todavía forcejeando con su pasado de primate: **"Bajo nuestra fina piel humana está nuestra naturaleza animal**. Necesitamos reconocerla como parte de nosotros y superar los impulsos violentos primitivos".

Yagi ve al ser humano todavía forcejeando con su pasado de primate

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Please discuss your connections to the San Francisco Bay Area, and why you've chosen to live and work here after living in several locations including Colorado and southern California.

I was raised and educated in Denver, Colorado. I received an MBA in finance, and worked for various commercial finance companies, ending up at Bank of America. I accepted a position in Los Angeles with BofA to advance my career. At that time, my art was on the back burner. After 5 years in LA, a dear friend of mine in San Francisco was diagnosed with AIDS, so I asked for a transfer to SF to be closer to him. In retrospect, relocating to San Francisco was the best thing I ever did for my artistic life. Living here has a tremendous influence on my life because of the creative and cultural climate, plus the wider acceptance of nonconformity.

You are involved in several San Francisco art communities: ArtSpan, and where you work, an arts studio space collective on Bryant Street. How do you find working within or having an art space in these communities?

ArtSpan, which organizes SF Open Studios, has helped by introducing me to people who really understand the local art scene, as well as referring me to curators, leading ultimately to exhibition opportunities. ArtSpan has organized educational seminars covering topics that are very relevant to working artists. Participating in Open Studios has increased my exposure in the Bay Area. The artists at South Beach Artists Studios on Bryant Street, where I have my studio, are supportive friends. Artmaking is a solitary activity requiring a great deal of hard work, and it is good for one's mental health to leave the studio once in a while and have the camaraderie of artist friends. Likewise, I try to be supportive of my artist friends by attending their art openings, giving words of encouragement, and helping out with little things like photographing their artwork. After leaving the Bank, I made the commitment to increase my connection with other artists. For example, on a regular basis, I meet up with what is called the "Artists Roundtable." The group meets for coffee, view various art exhibits, sketch together, while sharing insights, inspirations and encouragement.

Please talk a little bit about why you think you have had more exposure in the southern California art market. Has it affected your career in any way to have a show in your city? You also have a show coming up in Berkeley in 2012. Do you see different responses to your art based upon location?

Gaining exposure in LA was serendipity: I met my gallerist, Bert Green, at an Open Studio event in San Francisco, before he opened his gallery in LA. Bert has developed a good audience for my work in LA, fueled by the entertainment industry with its mainstay of creative people who are more open to unusual work, have the buying power, and are often influential. It's been harder to get shown in San Francisco. I am hoping that the current show at the Incline Gallery as well as a recent show at ARC will help me gain local visibility. I see no difference in reaction to my work between LA or SF.

Your career background in banking is quite different than one typically imagined for an artist. Has it helped you in any way? You recently retired and have devoted yourself full-time to your art. Please discuss your background and what led up to that decision to become a full time painter.

When I was young, my father and I often battled over my future education and career plans. I was always making art when I was a kid, but his admonition was "artists starve." My family is very risk averse, and of course, that has rubbed off on me. So I took his advice and embraced a career in finance/commercial banking, even though I loved art and science. I was inspired to return to my art after meeting an older woman sculptor who advised me not to wait until I was too old and no longer had the needed energy for artmaking. Shortly thereafter, I saw an interview with David Hockney, who said "I have never heard of an artist on his deathbed say "Gee I wish I had been a vice president at Bank of America." I knew he was directing that statement at me! I realized that I was trying to be someone that I wasn't, and that I needed to find a way to become a full time artist. I cut my hours back at the bank and signed up for continuing education courses in drawing and painting; the extra day each week plus the weekend was devoted to studio work, which helped me retain my sanity. My background in business helped me to develop a practical, rational mind, and these skills are invaluable in running the business side of being an artist. Being trapped in the corporate world for 27 years feeds into some of the angst that seeps into my art.

San Francisco Art Beat Interview with artist Sandra Yagi

How would you typically describe your work to your audience? It seems to defy any typical modern genre classification. There are surrealist nuances of Hieronymus Bosch, and the draftsmanship of classic Dutch painting in your art. Some have placed it in pop-surrealism. Do you agree with that?

My work is not surrealism as defined in the Surrealist Manifesto, because there are elements of rationality and reason embedded throughout. My work is best described as realistic rendering of scenes that are from the imagination. The imagery is an exploration of the blurred line between humanity and our animal nature. I love so many periods and styles of painting which have influenced my work: the Renaissance, Titian, Van Eyck, early anatomical illustrators, like Vesalius and Albinus, and more recent masters like Dali, Teraoka, Walton Ford. And yes, I LOVE Bosch. I don't believe that my work fits neatly in the pop-surrealism genre. I paint more realistically and classically than the painting style normally found in the category. Pop surrealism has in its ancestry the underground comics genre and also has elements of anime, and neither of these areas have influenced my work. However, like pop surrealism, my work has subtle dark humor.

Skeletons in your work seem to be a significant catalyst for much of the art's intention and message. They predominantly perform the main, but varied actions: whether dancing, cloning, morphing, performing sexual acts on living humans, or subject of still lifes and Memento Mori. Can you explain your interest in skeletons, and why skeletons tend to be your primary subject matter?

From an aesthetic perspective, I love the beauty of skeletons, whether they are animal or human. If you look carefully, there are no hard angles anywhere on a skeleton; instead, there are elegant and subtle curves. Skeletons, especially human skeletons, are the symbol of mortality. An image with a skeleton dancing or having sex is a wonderful contradiction; here you have a symbol of death partaking in an activity that is the essence of life. To create something that is supposedly dead and make it appear to be believably alive is a wonderful challenge.

I'm impressed with your ability to blend contemporary culture with classic themes. This is evident not only in your religion and mythology series, but indirectly in all your art. Is your idea behind this, "the more things change, the more they stay the same," or is it something different?

You hit the nail on the head. Human technology may advance, but great contemporary art is still concerned with age old issues such as mortality and the human condition. Ancient mythology, once you take out the weird monsters or unbelievable powers of the gods, is still about our human comedy: vanity, love, jealousy, greed, hatred, and war. Myths attempt to explain our relationship with nature, and who we are.

What have been the more memorable projects, either most exciting or greatest personal achievements, you have been involved in as an artist?

The most memorable project was the installation that I did for the Oakland Museum of California group show "Dia de los Muertos" several years ago. This involved a projected video of animated dancing skeletons and required 200 charcoal drawings. I had to teach myself how to do video editing using Final Cut Express, and this is an achievement because I'm not the most tech-savvy person.



Beetle Browed Skull

Barbie & Other Monstrosities

The Mattel mythology of Sandra Yagi

By [Ron Garmon](#)

For a town that prides itself on self-promotion, Los Angeles keeps many of its alluring treasures prudently hidden. For every publicized haul (like the Louise Bourgeois exhibition fast coming to a close at MOCA), there are dozens of crannies each glistening with its magpie's horde. Keeper of one such is Bert Green: genial, shaven-pated proprietor of an eponymous gallery on West 5th Street. His grin, Zarathustra-like, never falters, even while dealing with the numerous aggressive freaks comprising much of the walk-in trade on Gallery Row, one of whom was keeping him busy on a recent Thursday afternoon while an equally freakish critic took run of his place. In the back, past Jessica Cutaz (washed-out, hyper-realistic drawings of crumpled baggies and other detritus) and Doug Cox (blanched landscapes dotted with blank human outlines) lies a generous, cake-like wedge of something far wilder: Sandra Yagi's muster of harpies and sirens, sphinxes and gorgons glow on the walls, with monster and victim rendered in thick, painterly strokes laid on like sugar frosting. This fleshy sexiness is given one last gleeful twist once you realize these monsters out of Greek mythology are all Barbie dolls.

"In all of those, Barbie is mythological, and represents something which cannot be attained," Yagi explains, chatting pleasantly from her San Francisco studio, "She's an impossible woman-image and a tyranny." In *Siren Song Barbie*, human girls caper in the tide near the monstrous icon, part Bulfinch and part bullshit, courting the old, old calamity. "The girls are trying to be like Barbie, to swim to her like the sailors," Sandra says, adding almost unnecessarily, "I think Barbie is a very harmful myth."

Well, yes. The Mattel toy isn't exactly brave Ulysses, and part of what draws faces to Yagi's gnomish and hilarious art is her juxtaposition of the mythic and the banal, with the alluring abyss that is Barbie

containing both. "In all of these, Barbie has to look vapid," Yagi says. "I didn't change anything! That's how she looks, and I should know since now I own more Barbies than I ever have in my life. My sisters loved Barbie, but Mom gave me one as a kid and I hated her! Those eensy little feet and perfect boots! Have you ever seen the ethnic Barbie? Well, they have African-American Barbie and she has Caucasian features," Sandra kvetches sweetly. "Then they had Asian Barbie, and I don't look like her!"

While Barbie might represent an oppressively impossible ideal, there's a certain democratic leveling involved in Sandra's series *Petit Mort* (that's "little death," and a French euphemism for an orgasm), also hanging at Bert Green until February 28th. Each entry depicts two skeletons in a different sex position, with canvases titled *Missionary*, *Jackhammer* and *Doggie Style*.

"I just love skeletons!" she enthuses, gamine-cheery as Wednesday Addams. "I have a full-sized human skeleton replica I look at a lot. I like how bones look, and always look for excuses to do them. You can get a sense of expression even in a skull by tilting its head," chirps the painter, who a decade ago was a Bay Area bank employee who kept such ghoulish Mittyisms locked away in her own cranium. "It's all in the gesture."

Indeed, Yagi's bone-dancers are as expressive as calcium gets, lacking only the flesh she slathers in such eatable profusion on her Barbies and monsters. Even her reptiles glisten, scaled hides like mobile jewel cases as they slither around quartered human skulls. "I'm getting ready to do a few more skulls," Sandra says. "I want to do a confrontation between human and *Homo erectus* skulls – a series of that and probably more lizards. I like lizards."

Sandra Yagi's paintings hang at Bert Green Fine Art until Feb. 28. 102 W. 5th St., downtown L.A., (213) 624-6212. bgfa.us.

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