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**Kirby Scudder: San Jose ICA brings in innovative artist Amy Ellingson**

**Posted: 06/18/2014**



'Apparent Reflectional Symmetry, Parts I and II,' (dyptich), by Amy Ellingson, oil and encaustic on eight panels. Photo by John Janca.

In 1977 a group of artists in San Jose, disenchanted with the lack of local representation for artists, opened an alternative space called Word Works. They began to show cutting-edge art and embraced performance and installation works by Bay Area artists. By 1980 the group had become divided about the long term direction for the organization and split into two factions. One group moved to Third Street and renamed the space "Works' (today known as "Works/San Jose") It's the longest running alternative art space in San Jose.

The other group rented a space downtown and formed the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art.

Through the 1980s and '90s, the SJICA had its highs and lows while struggling to find its footing in the community. In 2000 former San Jose Museum of Art curator Cathy Kimball joined SJICA as its director. Under Cathy's leadership, SJICA has become a preeminent cultural institution in the Bay Area presenting the works of renowned artists from around the country and the world. Today SJICA programming consists of both compelling and conceptually challenging contemporary art, with a host of educational programs. Established printmakers teach printmaking workshops in the on-site Print Center. In addition to gallery programming, there is "Night Moves," new media installations in the front and rear windows that are visible only after dark. After years of working toward their long term goal of having a permanent home, in 2006, SJICA purchased a 7,500-square-foot building in the SOFA arts district of downtown San Jose.

On June 7, SJICA opened its latest exhibit, an ambitious, site-specific installation by San Francisco artist Amy Ellingson titled "Iterations & Assertions." The exhibition centers on a large-scale diptych, a 40-foot-long mural, and a 3-D sculptural translation of the diptych. Amy received an M.F.A. from CalArts. She is the recipient of the 2009 Fleishhacker Foundation Eureka Fellowship and the 1999 Artadia Grant to Individual Artists and has been awarded fellowships at the MacDowell Colony, the Ucross Foundation, and the Civitella Ranieri Foundation. Amy's work looks at the dichotomy between digital rendering processes and traditional painting methodologies. "Iterations & Assertions" runs through Sept. 13 and Amy will be speaking about her work next Thursday, June 26 at 6:30 p.m. at SJICA.

I spoke with Cathy Kimball about the SJICA and "Iterations & Assertions."

Kirby Scudder: When you joined SJICA how much of a priority was moving into a permanent space?

Cathy Kimball : When I first joined SJICA, it was going through some challenging times. We realized right away that we had to deal with the facilities issue. But, in order to even think about the facility, we really had to address the programming and donor issues. So the first few years was spent on dealing with the financial stability of the organization and making sure that the exhibition program was on track and of the quality that would attract a member base and donors. Once that was in place we were able to start a capital campaign that eventually allowed us to secure the building. We were really lucky. We had really committed people supporting us that when we asked for money. It was clear to everyone that we needed to move. We had no heat or air-conditioning with one toilet. Everybody understood.

KS: How did the exhibit "Iterations & Assertions" come about?

CK: I have known about Amy and Amy's work for a while and have admired it and always wanted to do something with her. And every other year, San Jose hosts the "Zero1 SJ Biennial," which brings the arts and technology together. We were under the impression that the next one would be in the summer of 2014. I wanted to do something in the spirit of the biennial without being overtly technological and Amy's work seemed to be the perfect show and a great companion to Zero1. By the time we had already committed to the show, we learned that they had decided to postpone the Biennial until 2015. But even without the association with the Biennial, it is an incredible show. It's pretty spectacular. All of her compositions start on the computer and then she manipulates them in Photoshop and eventually projects them onto the final surface. There, through a very intricate method using chalk lines and maskings, it draws the images which eventually get painted with a variety of mediums including encaustic. It is hard to describe but the resulting works are incredible.

For more information about SJICA go to [www.sjica.org](http://www.sjica.org/).

Kirby Scudder is the director of the Santa Cruz Institute of Contemporary Art. Details: [www.scica.org](http://www.scica.org/)