

fine art base embeds whimsical installations in the hillsides and redwood branches surrounding Henry Miller Library.

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By Mica Quintana



STAYING MOBILE : San Francisco artist **Susan Chen**'s work (above) creates an alternative universe of creative possibilities.

Just inside the gate of the Henry Miller Library, a cloud of miniature worlds dangles from the branches of a massive pair of redwood gatekeepers. Looking from afar like a pleasant throng of native insects, at closer quarters it takes on an alien feel: white moon-like planets swing in the breeze amidst fluorescent green palm-dotted islands and fuzzy seed pods that look like the disembodied mouths of some strange three-lipped creature.

Installed by San Francisco artist Susan Chen, this mobile is one of several pieces erupting out of the earth and vegetation surrounding the library, thanks to the vision of the nonprofit fine art base.

An experimental Sand City studio and gallery space in 2009, fine art base has gone baseless in 2010. But that doesn't mean it's gone spaceless; the organization has used its need to couchsurf as an impetus to create installations specifically designed for its unique surroundings.

The nonprofit's current project at Seaside City Center featuring fluorescent lights, mirrors and video, up through June 25, is the urban portion (Phase 1) of this year's series of site-specific installations called New Enterprise. Now, at Henry Miller, we get the rural portion (Phase 3). Phase 2 is a video about the other two projects to be shown at Sand City's West End Festival in August.

It remains to be seen whether San Francisco's Zachary Royer Scholz, local artist Kris Cowan and fine art base co-founder dlwilkinson will do as beautiful a job at commenting on site and environment here as they did in Phase 1, but the two artists whose works have already been installed have employed similar artistry in utilizing the wild space organically while surreptitiously altering it in an arresting and disconcerting manner.

"There's something really charming about them, I think," says Chen, of her floating islands. "But there's supposed to be a sense of unease. It's like [the island] could have been blown apart."

Oakland's Alena Rudolf creates a similar balance of charm and eeriness with her subtle installation tucked back on the hillside to the left of the library. An old window sits suspended between two redwood trees, the ivy growing along their trunks twining lazily along its panes. If you respond to the window's irresistible beckoning, you will slowly discover a rustic scene behind it featuring a chair, a table, and a lamp that turns on automatically at dusk, for an even more haunting feel.

Relying in part on fine art base's collaboration with the Monterey Regional Waste Management District, both artists created these installations out of reused materials. The fabric and plastic flowers on Chen's islands and the Bible sitting on Rudolf's table came from MRWMD's Last Chance Mercantile; materials were salvaged from San Francisco's From Scrap and Berkeley's Urban Ore.

A main goal here is to let discarded objects comment on environment, space and form in a whimsical, inquisitive fashion. "I really like to play," says Cowen, who is working on a metal sculpture installation on the hillside of the library grounds. "I find a lot of joy in reusing materials aesthetically after they have outlived their original purpose." dlwilkinson displays a similar playfulness in his plan to embed tiny round mirrors in the hillside surrounding the library's outdoor performance space to create the illusion that animals are watching the evening programs.

NEW ENTERPRISE: PHASE 3 will be up through September on the grounds of the Henry Miller Library, 1/4 mile south of Nepenthe on Highway 1, Big Sur. The show will evolve and expand throughout the course of the summer. www.fineartbase.org