

# Around The Rim

New shows at *SJICA*  
and *MACLA*

**T**HE SAN JOSE Institute of Contemporary Art makes maximum use

of its two-story-high skylights in its current show of works from the Pacific Rim Sculptors Group titled "In the Round." In Susan Leibovitz Steinman's installation, a precariously balanced series of well-worn step ladders rise in an alternating progression of A's and V's. The ladders, as indicated by the title—*Thwarted Escape*—look as if they are conspiring to climb their way to freedom through the skylight. A clever armature of ropes and stone weights holds the construction in a rickety but steady state.

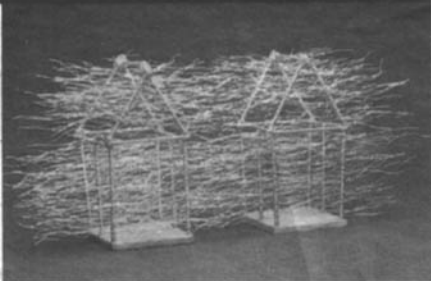
Hung from the upper reaches of the other light well, Gina Telocci's delicate figures, constructed from thin ribs of wood, look like specimens of microscopic animals blown up to a giant's scale. One open-ended funnel structure with a long undulating tail resembles the fantastical images of plankton created by 19th-century biologist Ernest Haeckel, who turned scientific illustration into a kind of proto-surrealism in his book *Art Forms in Nature*. Telocci's pieces possess the same magical feel as the underwater sequences in *The Life Aquatic*.

Also notable are the intricate bent-wire friezes of Pamela Merory Dernham, which are crowded with whole populations of outlined people connected in a single strand of thin steel; Laurie Polster's startling juxtaposition of natural (sawn half-rounds of wood) and man-made (a roll of tar paper) materials; and Ellen Vogel's small houses fashioned from struts of bone and hundreds of prickly segments of thick wire, like metal porcupine shelters.

Down the street, MACLA is showcasing the work of young local Latino artists. Angelica Muro's digital prints zoom in on some of the less savory aspects of society's urge to beautify at all costs. *Armpit wax* . . . \$25 and *Skin held taut* are alarming close-ups of chunks of wax embedded with extracted hairs. Alejandro Oliva's color photographs turn snapshots of walls into near abstractions. The deep-red background of *Agua* is marked by four drain pipes that have left staining drops. More obvious is *American Dream*, with a swath of blue behind some American-flag stars and a strand of barbed wire.

Mitsy Ávila Ovalles freely mixes media to create assemblages that layer together childhood memories of movie stars and pop singers with faded advertisements clipped from newspapers. One corner of the gallery is filled with an evocative re-creation of a young girl's desk, complete with portable tape player, board games, bric-a-brac, stuffed animals, a plastic cactus and a chalkware figurine, all presided over by the artist's totem tchotchke, the wise owl in a variety of collectible manifestations.

Michael S. Gant



**THE WIRE** Ellen Vogel fashions bristling houses from pieces of wire.

*IN THE ROUND* shows through March 12 at the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art, 451 S. First St., San Jose. (408.283.8155)

*BUSTIN' OUT* shows through March 5 at MACLA, 510 S. First St., San Jose. (408.998.ARTÉ)