

# Buried in paperwork

**Bee Art Correspondent**

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Made of shredded paper, a 14-foot tornado towers above viewers at the Kondos Gallery on the Sacramento City College campus.

Part of "Busywork," a show not of works on paper but of works made of paper, it swirls up off balance and would fall on your head if not for the guy wires suspending it from the ceiling.

We've all felt like we're being buried under the paper we receive on a regular basis – office memos, junk mail, Post-it notes, first drafts and second drafts and third drafts. Penny Young, the Los Angeles artist who made the tornado out of discarded paper, decided to put the detritus of her office to use as a medium for sculpture.

She also gives us a pair of whimsical works consisting of Rolodex files printed with random phrases and Jenny Holzer-like "truisms." "Punishment and reward often look the same," reads one, and another: "Unapproachable celebrity." As you push the button on the motorized Rolodex, different words pop up in no particular order.

"Penny has worked a lot of office jobs, filing and keeping things in order," said the show's curator, Mitra Fabian, an art professor at the college. "These works are a reaction against that, a way of disordering things meant to be ordered. It's a way of opposing authority, creating chaos out of order."

Fabian explained that the title of the exhibition – "Busywork" – is tongue-in-cheek. It refers to "fruitless labor" – doing something to keep your hands busy, which is often associated with women in a derogatory way. This show of works by women is meant to demonstrate that all repetitive labor is not fruitless, that it can have value as art.

Fabian's own work, a collaboration with local artist Jen Stract, is made of rolls of receipt paper, the kind your grocery store prints out with your purchases.

Titled "Reckoning," it fills one long wall of the gallery. Thin strips of white paper, 9,000 feet in all, loop and drape across the white wall in elegant patterns suggestive of decorative Victorian garlands and bunting.

The muted tones of the slightly different whites of wall and paper and the shadows the work casts result in a surprising revelation of color, as if the eye needs to add color to Fabian's muted palette. It's a remarkably beautiful site-specific sculpture that will be discarded once it comes down.

This object made of paper meant to record monetary transactions, Fabian said, ironically can't be sold. It resists the commodification of art, being ephemeral in nature, a fleeting statement only accessible in the gallery for a limited period of time.

"There's an element of obsession and compulsion to it," Fabian confided.

In fact, all of the artists in the show demonstrate tendencies to obsessive-compulsive disorder. San Francisco artist, Jill Sylvia, makes oddly beautiful sculptures of old ledger papers used by her father, an accountant. Cutting out the spaces between the lines of the grids on the paper, she creates delicate lattices of open work as tightly structured and involved as lace making. In "C.S. Book," the skeletal remains of the paper become an object beautiful to behold.

Again, ledger books are used for recording financial information, but cut apart, the information is gone and they become valueless, Fabian noted.

"It takes eight hours for her to cut a single sheet," Fabian said. "It raises the question of what her time and labor are worth. How is she compensated for her work?"

San Jose printmaker Fanny Retsek also incorporates a kind of accounting into her work, "Oh Yeah, Darfur." A narrow sheet of paper 50 feet long is covered with thousands upon thousands of hatch marks. It dangles from the ceiling and forms a nest on the floor. Each mark counts a lost life in the conflict in Darfur, an area of the African country Sudan.

Ironically, the hatch marks are printed on exquisite Japanese Gampi paper and run through an etching press, giving the finished product an element of luxurious beauty that is belied by the darkness of the numbers in the news from Darfur, where Sudan's leaders are accused of genocide.

It brings a disturbing note to the show, which ranges from humor to beauty to serious social commentary. The hands that made the pieces in "Busywork" were not idle, but created fascinating objects for us to contemplate.

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