

## The Exhibitionist: Figured Out

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by **Maureen Davidson** on Nov 03, 2010

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Detail from David Lebow's 'Eyeball Attack.'

Human eyes are drawn to it first, irresistibly, no matter what the vista. Some anthropologists say that our popular culture is obsessed with, even worships it. We certainly know nothing quite as completely as we know it: the human figure. That quadri-limbed shape dances along the roofs of caves, the unmistakable mark of humankind from the time our species harnessed fire and hunted with pointed sticks. We know it so well that, with only a hint, a figure becomes a story—a woman gleefully dances, a man runs away fearfully, two estranged people long for union—the essence of a gesture can be conveyed in a few strokes of a pen, a simple shape. We also know immediately when there's something not quite right. That's why working from the figure is the staple of every art school in the Western world. The National Figurative Show at the Santa Cruz Art League attracted submissions from artists nationwide. I was impressed with every ceramic sculpture represented, and remembered that figurative work surprisingly dominated the national Ceramics Annual in San Francisco a few months ago. Kimberly Cook's *Marriage of Heaven and*

*Hell* could have lived happily among that "best of the best" crowd. Her gasp-inducing dream—or nightmare—figure that morphs into a house that totters on a Rococo-ish base is a marvel of technique within a dynamic composition, all perfect glistening reds and lustrous gold glazes as counterpoint for flatter, unearthly whites. Fred Yokel built the charmingly abstracted voluminous leaning torso of *How'd This Happen?* with flattened coils so crisp and defined that the coils themselves become the story within a spot-on gesture. The rich surfaces of both of his sculptures here draw the eye into the works, as elegant as they are droll. Julia Field provokes a different response with her children at play, notably *Ready or Not*, first by sculpting them with knowing restraint, then painting a world on a leg, a skirt, a torso. Every style is represented on the wall. Two oils by Ros Bowns, especially *Knee*, are meticulously rendered then blown apart in a Francis Bacon-like distortion. The distinctive expressionistic style of Sefla Joseph and Ursula O'Farrell invigorates the room. Hsuan-Che Chen's airy realism is sparkingly deployed in *Drifting* while Burt Levitski and Clark Louis Gussin hearken to the Flemish Masters in their deep, meticulously rendered luminosity. W. Downey Dyer's impressionistic boys on the beach is charming while Annie Murphy-Robinson's *Dordogne* uses charcoal like a carving chisel. Charles Prentiss' sure touch radiates in *Hilda*. Mei-Ying Dell'Aquila's *Health Care* has all the wild boldness of a monumental mural while Dave Lebow uses an Ash Can School looseness to create amazing mythical tales. So many stories, so little room... Read more of The Exhibitionist at [www.kusp.org](http://www.kusp.org).

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