



SECA Award Winners at the SFMOMA

Passing on the Baton

By [Nirmala Nataraj](#) (Feb 18, 2005)

- [SFMOMA](#)
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- [2004 SECA Art Award](#)

The 2004 Society for the Encouragement of Contemporary Art (SECA) Awards portend a shift in modern art -- from the sweeping, dramatic debacles so many of us associate with "modern art" to a subtle, softer, and perhaps more complex, representation of the uncertainty that serves as a book end to the modern experience. Currently on exhibit at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, **The SECA Award Exhibit**, a biennial juried show that honors local artists, features works by Rosana Castrillo Diaz, Simon Evans, Shaun O'Dell, and Josephine Taylor.

SECA is one of SFMOMA's seven auxiliaries, and it administers one of the most distinguished awards shows for emerging artists in San Francisco. This



Rosana Castrillo Diaz, Untitled, 2004; graphite on paper; 10 x 14 inches; courtesy of the artist; copyright Rosana Castrillo Diaz



Shaun O'Dell, The Transformers Diagram Showing Imperialist Expansion of Continental Altitudes, 2004; ink and gouache on paper; 26 x 23 inches; courtesy of the artist and Jack Hanley Gallery, San Francisco; copyright Shaun O'Dell

year alone, over 200 artists were nominated by art professionals -- curators, art school instructors, galleries, critics, former recipients -- but those who made the final cut display a distinctly sophisticated understanding of the fragile intricacy of our daily experiences. Diaz, Evans, O'Dell, and Taylor all work in different media and highlight various themes in their pieces, but the complex manner with which they approach subjects and even cultural icons perceived as mundane, makes each piece as transcendent as it is ephemeral.

Rosana Castrillo Diaz is responsible for one of SECA's centerpieces, a 30-foot drawing composed entirely of loops of cellophane tape that decorate the gallery wall like a filmy veil, or a spider's web. Diaz strives to break down our codes of visual distinction, and her piece both recedes from and advances to the foreground, revealing itself slowly but offering the illusion of continuous disappearance. It's a ghostly apparition that questions perceptions of both the material and immaterial and of the zone we ourselves occupy between presence and absence. Castrillo also delves into realms that are less ethereal with traditional works of graphite on paper that are real-scale depictions of recognizable objects such as envelopes, index cards, and stacks of paper viewed from the side. With these works, Castrillo imbues her subject/objects with a credible air that blurs the lines between reality and representation.

Simon Evans directly tackles the idiosyncrasies of the mundane with quirky charts and diagrams that convey the voyeuristic feeling of stumbling upon a neurotic person's notebook. Evans was directly inspired by Jonathan Swift's satirical masterpiece *Gulliver's Travels*, and unsurprisingly, his work is highly effective in approaching art through the lens of an explorer. With keen commentaries such as "Diagram of an Interaction with a Different Body/Yellow Concerns," Evans elevates his obsession with listmaking and relentless observation to an archival masterpiece. Collages also become maps of the human experience, and range from a constellation of holes from cigarette burns to pie charts that strive to measure sadness.

Like Evans, Shaun O'Dell is also something of a cartographer of the human experience. O'Dell's work is imbricated in coded drawings that create an iconography of the American "myths" which permeate contemporary culture. Specifically, O'Dell is fascinated with the mythology of the American frontier and the language of Manifest Destiny. With symbols ranging from log cabins to the heads of Puritan pilgrims, O'Dell connects the migratory movements of European settlers with the conquest of land and nature. "The Transformers Diagram Showing Imperialist Expansion of Continental Altitudes" is a parody of the imperialist's cartographic precision and obsession with geographic rendering. In fact, most of O'Dell's work reveals a preoccupation with proportions and balance, which belie the tension of his themes of desire and conquest, which cannot be contained in the spaces he creates.

Josephine Taylor presents perhaps the most disturbing images in the exhibit. With her ink and colored pencil drawings, Taylor probes issues of childhood trauma, physical vulnerability, and the dynamics of power and control in



Josephine Taylor, *Chicken* (detail), 2004; colored pencil and graphite on paper, 78 inches x 138 inches; Collection of Paul Rickert, Greenbrae, CA; copyright Josephine Taylor

young people's lives -- with a starkness and honesty that suggests a wrenching personal history. Taylor employs elements of self-portraiture and narration that culminate in a diaristic effect; and the central focus on childhood trauma creates a psychic space that is both intimate and claustrophobic. "Chicken" is a particularly terrifying caricature of seemingly innocent playground antics. In it, a monstrous-looking girl's head is doubled as she sits on a boy's back and bears down on another girl, presumably, in a game of Chicken. While the figures in the picture are innocuous at first glance, they are also grotesquely rendered, depicting the exaggerated sense of danger that every victimized child can relate to.

Since 1967, the SECA award has honored contemporary legends like Barry McGee (1996) and Andrea Higgins (2002). As the baton is passed to a new generation of artists, the provocative and stirring renditions in the 2004 exhibit herald an explosion of similarly evocative works in the world of contemporary art.

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