

Michael Kessler: *Graftings*

By ERIN J. SMITH / CASA

WEAVING NATURAL SHAPES WITH PANELS OF COLOR USING ONLY A PAINTBRUSH, painter Michael Kessler explores the limits of order and meaning in his show *Graftings* on display at Artamo Gallery through the month of November.

“Art expresses the self, your make-up, and how you approach the world. It expresses personality,” said Kessler, who describes himself as someone who is fascinated by order and precision.

Kessler first came to know he wanted to be an artist as a child sitting in church. It was while practicing on the church bulletins that Kessler taught himself to draw. “While the preacher was doing his thing, I would sit there and draw,” he said. “Everything came alive. That was it: me and the drawing.”

Kessler graduated from Kutztown University in Pennsylvania with a bachelors in fine art. After finishing his undergraduate work, Kessler spent a year in the Whitney Independent Study



Michael Kessler

Program at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City. Although a foundational experience for him as an artist, Kessler decided to retreat to the Pennsylvania countryside and chose not to live in the city. “I am lucky computers

came along,” he said. “The internet has enabled a busy, active career from remote locations, which provide me with distinct and singular perspectives on the world.” Kessler now lives and works in Santa Fe, New Mexico, but his paintings are in numerous galleries and museum collections, including the Santa Barbara Museum of Art.

Even though at present Kessler finds his life’s work a joy, he struggled like many artists in his earlier years. “I had no guarantee that this was going to work,” he said in reference to his art

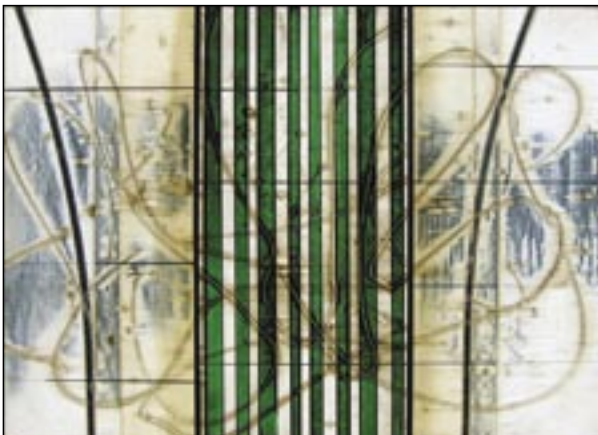


Velar 40x30 by Michael Kessler

career. “It’s not easy at the beginning, because art has no viability. It takes faith. I just kept at it.” In his twenties, Kessler lived on \$4,000 a year driving a school bus and painting during the day. “It’s a period you have to go through as an artist. It’s crazy.” Kessler is excited about everything related to the process of creating art, “From painting the canvas, to walking in the world looking for inspiration, to thinking about it, to documenting it, to taking the check to the bank—I’m lucky I love every single aspect of creating art, because not all artists do,” he said.

The work in *Graftings* is brand new, some which were still drying as Kessler loaded them into the truck. He selected the title to resonate on many levels. “The word ‘graftings’ calls to mind skin grafts, or grafting limbs to trees—where external layerings are built up,” which relates to Kessler’s painting process in which he “builds the surface” of paintings. “I hope people come to appreciate the process of unpacking these layers, tracing the sequence of how the painting is put together,” he said.

As an artist, Kessler takes inspiration from the natural world through memory, and snapshots of textures and color combinations, and his compositions reflect this. “I’m affected by everything I see,” said Kessler. “I extract things from nature and catalogue natural beauty. The paintings happen in mysterious, uncontrollable ways.” He describes his paintings as breathing, as if there’s something alive about them, that his art changes as his personality grows: “I don’t sense running out of ideas soon or an end to where I could take things.”



Accumbent 39x54 by Michael Kessler

Artamo Gallery is located at 11 W Anapamu St. and is open 1-6pm Wednesday through Sunday. For more information, call 568-1400 or visit www.artamo.com.