



Santa Barbara Arts: Gary Chafe

The Human Comedy

By ERIN J. SMITH / CASA

DEFINING ART IS LIKE TRYING TO CATCH A BUTTERFLY for artist Gary Chafe, but still worthy of the pursuit.

“I love the range of the arts, from the most primitive to the craziness of Gorky or Picasso,” said Chafe, whose many talents are on display at Santa Barbara Arts through June 30th. “I like landscapes, too. In my work I try to capture the feeling of a place rather than what it is—I change them so they’re not just photographs.”

The 20 pieces included in the show reflect the range of Chafe’s artistic interests,



Gary Chafe

which include everything from drawing to sculpture and monotype printing. Chafe draws inspiration from area beach scenes and palm trees make regular appearances, as well as circus themes and dancers. But overall his works reflect on

the human condition. His favorite piece in the show is the *Handstand*, which depicts an acrobat balancing upside down on his hands. “It’s an impossible painting, but there’s a struggle going on in the distortion that works,” he said.

As a child, Chafe started drawing cartoons of the daily news reports he’d see on television in the 1940s. Although his accuracy of the war scenes startled his parents, it was clear he had a talent for drawing. “Drawing is the bones of a piece,” he said. “The paint can be slathered on afterwards, but it has to have something to hang on.” He studied with a private instructor and continued his studies when his family relocated to Santa Barbara. He’s been active in the Santa Barbara art scene ever since, from attending local schools and graduating from Santa Barbara High



The Handstand by Gary Chafe

School to eventually opening art galleries of his own—the YES Store in 1969 and its counterpart, the Noh Store, in 1986.

While attending Santa Barbara City College, he studied art with Charles Atkinson and went on to earn a California teaching credential in Graphic Arts. From 1955 to 1957, Chafe worked as a draftsman illustrator in the Navy, which took him to the far east. “I was struck by how art was incorporated into daily life. It’s not a separate thing,” said Chafe. “Paintings change with the seasons, becoming more than furniture on the wall.” His artwork is included in both private and larger collections, including Phoenix Art Museum and Santa Barbara Museum of Art, and he was honored with a Colville Foundation grant in 2008. He currently works out of his studio and is an active member of Santa Barbara Printmakers.

Chafe recently underwent angioplasty, prompting him to rediscover sculpture. His willingness to keep learning and growing as an artist has kept him going. “I’m a seeker. I’m still looking and learning at 71 and a half,” he said. “When you think

you’re going to die, you start thinking about what you want to do. I couldn’t live without art.”

There will be an artist’s reception on June 4th from 5-8pm as part of June’s 1st Thursday events.

Santa Barbara Arts is located in the La Arcada Court at 1114 State St. Hours are 11am to 6pm, Mon through Sun. For more information, call 884-1938.



Montecito Dog by Gary Chafe