

## **Alien Objects** By Mirelle Raza

Our general understanding of the materials used in artwork usually includes paint, pencil, canvas, ink, and perhaps even fabric. The de Saisset Museum, located on Santa Clara University's campus, challenges these notions by recently opening an exhibit containing a less familiar material, clay. *Clay in the Bay*, which displays the work of artists exclusively from the Bay Area, demonstrates an innovative form of art that has the opportunity to be manipulated in infinite ways. Twelve artists: Bean Finneran, Don Fritz, Francisco "Pancho" Jiménez, Robert Kvenild, David Linger, Spring Montes, Matthew Scheatzle, Nancy Selvin, Ehren Tool, Monica Van den Dool, Jenni Ward, and Stan Welsh contribute to *Clay in the Bay*, presenting pieces that illustrate their dedication to working with the medium. The twenty sculptures show the ways ceramics can be used to produce artwork, from shelves of intricate cups to a giant puzzle piece with an unspoken message. The de Saisset offers a history for clay work in the Bay Area and an authentic experience with the creations of the modern day.

Upon entering the *Clay in the Bay* exhibit, I was immediately drawn to Bean Finneran's pieces; "White Cone", "Purple Cone", and "Orange Cone." To describe these pieces is not an easy task, as they are unlike anything else. From afar they imitate the figure of miniature trees, but with each step closer, I found their shape becoming more of a mystery. My first assumption was that the thousands of rods creating the shape were formed of plastic, as they drooped in a way that looked as though gravity were pulling them down. My self-control was tested, as it was difficult not to reach out and touch the alien product that defied anything I could have imagined being made out of clay. The de Saisset seemed to understand because they provided a single rod, separate from the pieces, for the public to hold and feel. With the opportunity to feel the inflexibility and strength of the clay rod, my curiosity only grew. How were the rods held together? How were the pieces transported? How long did these pieces take? I found myself unable to move away from these fascinating and implausible objects.

The de Saisset Museum's staff was more than helpful, explaining how Bean Finneran brought each piece into the museum completely disassembled, sat down on the floor and built up her artwork rod by rod. Each clay rod is hand-rolled and the ends are dipped in different colors of glaze. The mix of colors of the rods and paints gives a festive look to each piece. Bean Finneran's technique permits her to create her artwork differently every single time she sets it out to exhibit. Knowing the time each piece took and the structure of the pieces only added to my appreciation of the "White Cone", "Purple Cone", and "Orange Cone".

I was not sure what to expect from the de Saisset Museum and was pleasantly surprised as it provided a sophisticated yet relaxed atmosphere for students and the public to explore the work and history of local artists. *Clay in the Bay* shows the use of clay in an entirely new light, stretching our imaginations far beyond simple pottery. Breaking the boundaries of modest household items, the de Saisset Museum exhibits the creativity of these twelve Bay Area artists and invites its guests to be inspired. Visitors will find that Finneran's work is only one example of the possibilities when using this material, as the eleven other artists provide their own take on transforming clay into alien objects. Stimulate your own creativity by visiting *Clay in the Bay*, with the de Saisset until March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2013.