

View of art

# A risque display?

By Tom Pakusich

An anonymous phone caller dutifully lodged her complaint.

There were no two ways about it — the exhibit was blatantly sexist, possibly even racist. Another caller expressed shocked indignation at the show's overt eroticism bordering on, if not falling into out and out pornography.

Is this kiddie porn? Opening night at a new strip joint on the Palos Verdes Peninsula? No, just an art exhibit at California State University Dominguez Hills.

Everyone and everything enjoys basking in a little controversy from time to time, and the art world is

usually the exception. So it is with some real anticipation that a new show of sculpture by bay area artist John Battenberg at the CSUDH University Art Gallery looks promising. And of course it is.

Shocked indignation or not, Battenberg's supremely skilled work in bronze

depicting strapped, spread eagled, writhing and beautifully bold female nudes doesn't need controversy to work.

Battenberg who looks and acts as if he'd be in sympathetic company with the welders at Todd Shipyard (and I have nothing but the highest regard for them and their craft) is hardly the type to be riled by the shows mixed reception.

"My only regret is that they didn't get that lady's phone number," he said. "I'm really in favor of women — it's here in my sculpture. In fact I am the greatest feminist."

And while Battenberg admits that this show could not be held at many large public galleries, he feels quite happy with the dimensions of the present show.

The work on the whole is sumptuously sensuous. There is a finely wrought delight in all aspects of Battenberg's work.

The polished smoothness of his pieces, their deep copper-tonality, the apparent malleability of bronzed flesh where it is indented, depressed and swelled by binding ropes, leather corsets or mummy-like bandaging points to a sheer delight in surface, texture and form.

This becomes even more forceful through the sculptor's uncompromising realism. A little more abstract and most would not have noticed or cared.

Certain pieces coyly play with the work of great sculptors of the past. Michaelangelo and Rodin certainly and as for contemporary artists — he finds kindred spirits in the work of Bob Graham, Hanson and Segal.

And like these latter two sculptors Battenberg casts directly from a living model, confronting his viewers with a raw realism some consider gratuitous in its extremes.

A series of nudes entitled "Bound Women" may conjure up certain parallels to kinkier elements of modern day sexploitation, violence and brutality, in somewhat the same way that Fellini confronts his audience with their own dark side.

One of the most magnificent pieces in the show, a work known as "sappho," depicting two intertwined female nudes while meticulously crafted becomes one of the most abstract works on display.

Blindfolded and bald they become forms without identity — primordial, timeless and universal. No mean accomplishment when dealing with otherwise realistic forms.

Someone suggested that the Battenberg show could

never have been construed as sexist if the sculptor had only included a male nude. Not only would such a move have missed the point but feminists might understandably have cried to-kenism.

One wonders if a sculpture series entitled "Bound Men" would have generated any flak from the other half of the population or just attract a different element to the gallery.

But this is all so academic and ultimately has nothing to do with Battenberg's work. Rather we are left with the works themselves, bold, confronting, no doubt even a little tongue-in-cheek. But sexist? No, never.

Battenberg will talk about his work at 2 p.m. Oct. 16 in room A102 of the Humanities and Fine Arts Building. The exhibit continues through Oct. 24.

## Carreras

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"When I was only 6 or 7 my mother took me to see a film, 'The Great Caruso' with Mario Lanza. When I came home I started singing and acting and imitating everything I had heard and seen.

"It was then my parents began to realize I had a voice and I started to study piano and solfeggio."

On entering the university in Barcelona, Carreras was supposed to devote himself to chemistry. But at the same time — he was 13 — he had begun vocal training with the teacher of Spanish tenor Giacomo Aragall: Jaime Francisco Puig.

One day Carreras made a decision. he would be a singer. 'I didn't know if I was born to sing but I did know I was not born to be a chemist.'

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