

Reaching Forward by Caleigh Flaherty

When I walked into the exhibit, *New Passages* I felt an immediate and powerful connection to the art in this stunning exhibit, which highlights navigating the world, migrating, traveling, and reaching forward into the future. Each sculpture and painting reflects an element of my personal experience this year, when I left Minnesota and moved to California to attend Santa Clara University. The exhibit, *New Passages*, vividly conveys the spectrum of excitement, passion, complexity and challenge that accompanies the journey undertaken by freshmen entering college.

New Passages is featured at the de Saisset Museum at Santa Clara University in Santa Clara, California for the full ten weeks of spring quarter, 2014 (April 10-June 15). The featured artists, sculptor Mari Andrews and painter Ann Holsberry, are friends. They have worked in close proximity to one another for over 20 years, but this exhibit is their first collaboration due to their unique forms of artistic expression. The artist's distinct areas of expertise and their use of different mediums create an engaging exhibit, which will appeal to a large array of viewers.

Mari Andrews uses both natural and man made objects (sundials and compasses) for inspiration for her three dimensional works of art (de Saisset). The rough and rugged materials she uses, such as wire and thorns, are metaphors for the physical and emotional challenges of navigating the world. Andrews' medium of choice was, for many years, drawing. While the pieces in this exhibit are sculptural, Andrews brings the precision and detail of drawing to her work, creating a powerful and unique form of art called "tangible drawings," or drawings translated into three dimensions (de Saisset).

In contrast, Ann Holsberry's multi-media paintings exude a graceful and fluid quality that is both calming and exciting. She draws inspiration from her Qi Gong practice, the Hubble space telescope, and her fascination with migratory birds (de Saisset). Her works portray the marvel of movement and migration. Holsberry's work, "Taking Flight" (2014) caught my attention as soon as I entered the exhibit. This panel of cyanotype, pastel, and gouache on paper is the largest piece in the exhibit and is centered on the back wall of the white, rectangular exhibit space. Her vivid depiction of three birds in flight, accompanied by a single human, is conveyed in tones of deep blue, which pop out against the white walled background. When I first encountered the panel, what it brought to mind was a flock of birds guiding a lost person in the right direction. Because the exhibit's curator cleverly left room for viewers' individual interpretations of the works of art by leaving the titles off, I didn't see the name of the piece, "Taking Flight," until perusing the information packet provided at

the tail end of the exhibit. At this point, the connection between birds and humans took on even greater significance, emphasizing the migratory habits of both species and evoking the qualities of flight, freedom, and movement forward into a new future. The piece reminded me that the experience college students have of relocating across the country and moving into a new phase of life is akin to that of birds in the natural world, migrating to fresh territory. This analogy allowed me to see that the pattern of young adults moving forward in their lives is as natural and inevitable as flocks of birds making their annual migratory journey.

The second work of art that drew me in was a sculptural “tangible drawing” by Mari Andrews titled “Wire Stones” (2013-2014). It is a collection of wall mounted, stone sized sculptures made out of wire. When looking at the piece close up, all you notice are pieces of wire molded in the shape of stones. However, stand further away and the pattern of the stones emerges so that viewers see the stones create a path, starting with a small line of sculpted stones that grow ever larger as the spray of stones moves from left to right, revealing directionality, intent, and the entrance to a new passage. Each stone casts a shadow so that when you stand directly in front of it, the three dimensional aspect of the sculpture jumps out, making the piece even more visually compelling. Andrew’s work expresses the theme of the exhibit, revealing that the beginning of a new passage or experience can lead to many bigger and more meaningful things.

This powerful exhibit left a lasting impression on me as I reflected deeply upon how the themes of migration, movement, and new passages are playing out in my own life. It allowed me to recognize the pain and challenges as well as the excitement and novelty of new experiences. Mari Andrews’ and Ann Holsberry’s very different portrayal of these themes allowed me to see that while our own personal experiences are unique to us, these themes themselves are universal and will impact each of us, at some time in our lives. As result, this exhibit is relevant and significant for people of all ages, not only incoming freshman in college. Our lives are constantly changing, moving in new directions and reaching into an unknown future, which is what makes the *New Passages* exhibit a must see.