

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

LIVING IN LAGUNA

Bugs creep into Paiment's art

What bugs artist Paul Paiment? Absolutely everything. Cleverly, Paiment creates beguiling paintings of hybrid bugs and melds modern technology with Mother Nature. His art demonstrates how rapidly an artist, rather than scientist, can make a new species evolve. The exhibition, at the Laguna Art Museum is entitled "Hybrids 1.0-3.5," an artist's playful vision of an evolutionary deviation that can only happen on paper.

Using an old egg tempera, watercolor technique, the artist creates bug-like creatures, which, when first seen, look like entomological illustrations. Soon, however, amusement takes hold as we realize that these appealing "things" are nature in artifice. These are not insects, but a composite of human toys and gadgetry made to look deceptively like bugs. Gleeefully, we search, among wings, antennae or other insect anatomy, for hidden, but familiar objects that, on first glance, seem like a real insect. To make the work even more appealing, Paiment presents his menagerie arranged in candy striped colors and target-like circles, something like colors and



ROBERTA CARASSO
ART WAVES

Paiment starts from the actual physiology of a particular bug. He portrays each of his insects either from their top or from their backs, where the most intriguing bug anatomy is found. Then he replaces some of the body parts with common human objects, which by association take on insect qualities. The bottom of a sneaker, in the context of an enlarged fly shape, is convincing as a wing. A lens from sunglasses overlaying an electric shaver and combined with a butterfly wing is transformed to gossamer creatures. Power drills become long scrawny legs; and a Volkswagen Beetle, from an aerial view with the addition of spindly legs becomes a beetle.

Moving from painting to painting, we relish searching among Paiment's imaginative bug-beings and chuehde when

shapes used in Optical art, advertising, or illustrations for the young. The upbeat nature of the design contributes to the joyful ambience of the exhibition.

we see how common shapes turn us into visual sleuths. Paiment is a master of shapes, finding like shapes that resemble others, but which are just slightly different. Similarity makes for believability when placed in the context of real body parts. Paiment follows in an old tradition of, for example, Giuseppe Archimboldo, a 16th Century Italian artist who painted portraits from a composite of fruits and vegetables. In this type of trompe l'oeil, or fool the eye depiction, the artist adds another dimension to the art, relishing that viewers need to hunt through imagery to find the unexpected.

The essence of Paiment's art is shapes. In the '90s, studying at University of Southern California, he became interested in Rorschach blots and the idea of interpreting imagery. Based on the human tendency to find the recognizable in the unrecognizable, people begin to see familiar images in the Rorschach blots where there may not be any. Paiment's ideas begin with the fact the people see shapes first, even before they see color. He is drawn to shapes and finds a trip to Target or browsing through a Sharper Image cata-

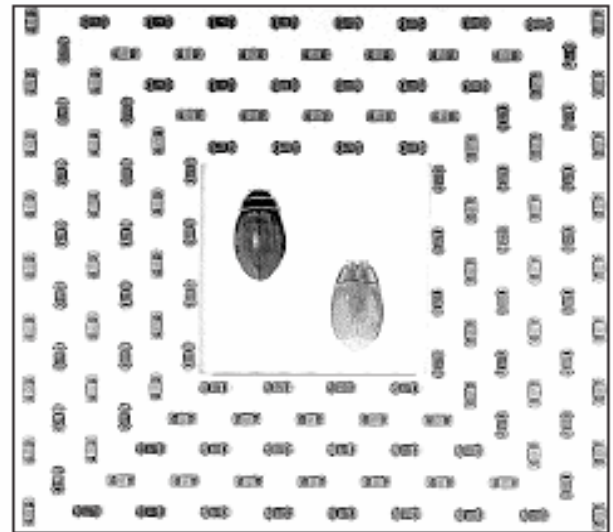


PHOTO COURTESY OF LAGUNA ART MUSEUM

BUGS: Paul Paiment's work, on exhibit at Laguna Art Museum, is the artist's playful vision of an evolutionary deviation that can only happen on paper.

logue, a rich source for finding new shapes to connect to his fantasy bugs or other shapes he may be creating.

The exhibition, therefore, is about a skillful artist having fun with the public, showing us something about how we perceive imagery, how we can be playfully fooled, and, most importantly, how disparate ideas when combined appear as something completely different. Below the light-hearted

surface, Paiment points out at least two existential principles - people tend to rationalize the irrational, and that art can lift us into a world of reality or fantasy where the impossible is possible.

The Laguna Art Museum is located at 307 Cliff Drive, 949-494-8971.

The exhibition closes on July 10.

Visit Roberta Carasso's Web site at www.carasso.com/roberta.