

Painting beyond the stretcher at the deCordova

By Chris Bergeron/DAILY NEWS STAFF

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LINCOLN -- For centuries, museums around the world have displayed sculptures standing on the floor and framed paintings hanging from their walls.

Exploding traditional distinctions between three- and two-dimensional art reflected in its own name, the deCordova Sculpture and Park and Museum is showcasing innovative work that fuses materials, forms and the creative act itself into a bold goulash that challenges everything that's gone before.

For "PAINT THINGS," co-organizers Dina Deitsch and Evan Garza have brought together 18 artists who have "busted out of the rectangle" to transcend the limitations of painted canvases displayed within a frame.

As the subtitle, "beyond the stretcher," suggests, this exhibit reveals what happens when contemporary artists put those time-honored distinctions between painting and sculpture into the blender and turn it on.

Mixing fun and provocation, Deitsch, curator at the deCordova, and Garza, the guest curator who serves as assistant director of the Fire Island Artist Residency, are inviting visitors to sample 20 years of art history to witness the birth of a hybrid art form, painting-as-sculpture and vice-versa.

Katie Bell hangs what appears to be construction debris – window blinds, carpet remnants and scraps of foam - on the wall. Sarah Cain makes painted sculptures that are both – and neither - sculptures and paintings. Some, like Analia Saban, destroy paintings to show how they're made while **Allison Schulnik** transforms paintings into sculptures and then into stop action videos. Along the way, Cheryl Donegan paints shamrocks with her "Royal Irish Ass." Georgia O'Keefe never tried that. Some viewers will be intrigued by art that straddles genres. Some will fume at pseudo-artists who've substitute trendy ideas for talent. A few will just be befuddled.

Deitsch said the idea for the exhibit originated in discussions with Garza about artists who'd "merged" painting and sculpture but expanded into even more recent work that explored ideas about gender, space and performance. While the idea of fusing painting and sculpture predates artists in this show, Deitsch cited Jessica Stockholder, a sculptor and installation artist born in 1959, as one of the first artists to "blur the lines between two- and three-dimensional artwork." In a seminal 1990 work combining elements of painting and sculpture titled "Kissing the Wall," Stockholder fixed spools of painted wool onto a chair tipped sideways, nudging a yellow patch on the wall.

Building on the notion of hybrid paintings and sculpture, Deitsch said feminist artists began to incorporate elements of performance into their works.

Two striking examples are Donegan's 1993 video in which she paints shamrocks with pads attached to her buttocks and a more provocative video that subverts pornography by appropriating certain images from it.

Commissioned by the museum for this show, Kate Gilmore's work, "Like This, Before," combines elements of installation, performance and video to parody, perhaps, the idea that "a woman's work is never done."

Before the exhibit opened, she built a sort of slanted frame with more than a dozen runnels on the side topped by a platform. As a videographer filmed her, Gilmore, wearing a dress and high heeled shoes, arduously climbed a ladder to individually fill about a dozen 1.5-gallon containers with white paint. Climbing once again, she tipped each container so it slide down the side, broke and spilled its paint.

While Gilmore may, indeed, be enacting a feminist parable, her filmed performance also resembles a Samuel Beckett absurdist one-act play in which viewers must fish for a meaning.

While **Allison Schulnik's** three stop-action videos certainly incorporate painted and sculpted bodies, they are, on their own, strange and beautiful and moving parables of inscrutable meaning. In "Forest," globular creatures with malleable features and faces seem to morph before our eyes in a sort of haunted forest. Simple, darker yet still enigmatic, "Hobo Clown" seems to follow the misadventures of a doughy fellow who seems a model of alienation.