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Drawings Featured In LBMA Exhibit

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Admittedly, I'm a big fan when it comes to works on paper.

Whether it is pencil, ink, graphite, chalk or silverpoint on anything from paper to wood, I find myself drawn to this particular genre. Perhaps that's why I have such an affinity for comic books.

In the art world's "high-brow" realm, drawing is considered the most "controversial and subversive act an artist can do." This has a lot to do with the belief that a drawing is merely done in preparation for a finished work, and therefore isn't really a work of art at all.

Personally, I like rebels and thankfully, Long Beach Museum of Art's current exhibit, "Sweet Subversives," breaks away from tradition and accepts drawing as a true art form. The exhibit allows visitors an opportunity to view a stunning array of contemporary works created by an equally impressive group of Southern California artists.

"The works included in this exhibition are drawings, not studies for paintings, primarily on two-dimensional surfaces with minimal mixed media," states the exhibit's introductory panel.

Entering "Sweet Subversives" is like stepping into a drawing itself. The blue-gray hue of the walls and the simple, yet elegant font for the labels compliments the art perfectly. And, while each piece of art stands out on its own, there's cohesion within the overall exhibit.

Choosing favorite works was difficult. Here are some highlights.

"I Think I'm Gonna Be A Little Late," Kiel Johnson's over-the-top, large-scale drawing of a globe-shaped city is a definite nod to what it's like living in Los Angeles. Freeways, at the center of it all, twist and turn while homes and buildings live on the edge. Power lines tie everything together, illustrating urban sprawl.

Fran Siegel's "Overland 8" is unlike any other "cityscape." Her work is created from cut paper, layered onto each other until the finished product emerges. The contrast of light and dark hues combined with gray areas is suggestive of daily life in a vast region.

Adonna Khare's "Elephant, Lion, & Buffalo" is a major work of art. Taking up an entire wall, the drawing portrays a menagerie of mammals, reptiles, birds and insects. Exquisitely detailed and methodical, Khare re-imagines the magic of the natural world.

From grand to humble, "Nino and Babette" is as sweet as they come. Tom Knetchel's drawing of a baby mouse and porcupine sleeping side by side is too cute for words. Again, it's all in the details. Their paws, whiskers, and eyes are so realistic; it makes you want to just hold them in your hand.

I don't think I've ever liked everything on view in one exhibit. "Sweet Subversives" is the first. The show succeeds in announcing that drawing is art. It captures our imagination and entertains our curiosities. Above all, it's an exhibit you'll want to keep visiting again and again.

The exhibit runs through Feb. 14.

An opening reception is set from 7 to 10 p.m. tonight, Thursday, during LBMA After Dark. For more information, call 439-2119 or visit www.lbma.org.

The Long Beach Museum of Art is at 2300 E. Ocean Blvd. Museum hours are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday. Admission is \$7 for adults; \$6 for students and seniors; free for members and children younger than 12. Admission is free every Friday.