

## Cool San Diego Sights!

Colorful photos of San Diego places and events.

### **A dark, disturbing look at art Beyond Reason.**



A very disturbing and powerfully thought-provoking exhibition has recently opened at the San Diego Museum of Art. Yesterday I walked through the dark galleries that contain Tim Shaw: *Beyond Reason*, and this morning my mind is still digesting the half dozen fantastic installations created by the celebrated artist.

Tim Shaw is a Northern Irish sculptor who, as a child in 1972, witnessed firsthand the bombing of a Belfast cafe during Bloody Friday. That exact, horrifying moment is recreated in a bloodless, abstract way in his installation *Mother, The Air Is Blue, The Air Is Dangerous*. Eerily spinning trays hover in the air above suddenly upset tables and chairs; the shadows of fleeing people stream across surrounding windows.

That same feeling of malice and inescapable chaos seems to echo elsewhere in Tim Shaw's work.

Walking through the dim galleries containing Tim Shaw: *Beyond Reason* feels inhumanly bleak. Little light, the low sound of a hollow, echoing, machine-like vibration all around, no human warmth. Like the corridors of a dark artificial video game world where there is no hope for actual daylight. Where synthetic horrors await around corners.

Themes explored by the six immersive installations range from the primal, unconscious complexity of human beings, to cynical exploitation in a materialistic society, to the uncertainties that rise in a technologically directed world.

I found the first installation that I encountered, Middle World, to be extraordinarily rich with symbolism. A massive sculpture, Middle World presents many small bronze figures that appear to have emerged from ancient mythology, Shakespeare, or the fleshy canvases of Hieronymus Bosch. The weird, expressive figures, some in masks, are arranged on a throne-like stage above what seem to be stalactites and beneath what seem to be Gothic columns and skeletons in catacombs. The sculpture incorporates the shapes of objects that are both modern and ancient, commonplace and supernatural. It's a mixture of space and time and human passion and compulsion and perplexity. A melting, flowing work of sculpted substance like an unending dream.

Other more disturbing installations that compose the exhibition concern dehumanization and include subjects like the silencing of free speech, vigilantism, human exploitation and depravity.

Defending Integrity from the Powers that Be presents two rocking-chair-like figures that are in constant back-and-forth motion. Both are gagged, and the muffled voices that emerge from either are unintelligible. According to a nearby sign, the piece represents how voices are silenced with money, and how people are influenced by the proliferation of disinformation on the internet. (What it fails to mention is that billions of ordinary people now speak their thoughts more freely than ever because of the Information Age. As a blogger who pays close attention to such things, I can tell you that many ideas don't go unheard because of stifling propaganda or censorship, but because the internet has become a complete babel of voices all desperately competing to be heard.)

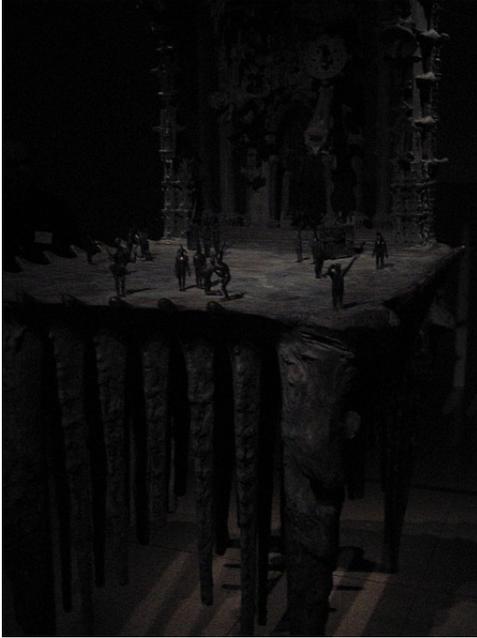
Another unique installation concerns technology and our evolving understanding of what it is to be human. Aptly titled The Birth of Breakdown Clown, the interactive sculpture seems to have a great deal of potential. Visitors enter a small room and stand before a human-like robot that moves its head and limbs while engaging with the audience. A member of the audience is invited to stand before the robot and converse with it. Breakdown Clown is said to possess artificial intelligence. Unfortunately, during the performance that I witnessed, I couldn't detect any sort of autonomous machine intelligence, or even working speech recognition. With an odd combination of humor, condescension and poetic rambling, the Genesis-quoting robot guided the entire conversation. Its often disconnected statements and responses were apparently composed by the artist.

Tim Shaw: Beyond Reason as a whole is a very forceful, challenging work of contemporary art that will strongly engage active minds. It presents unspeakable horror. It isn't for the squeamish. It's an examination of human darkness and potential inhuman darkness. It undertakes a quest for understanding. That which has come into existence tries to understand its own creation. An electronic clown tries to define the Mystery that underlies all things.

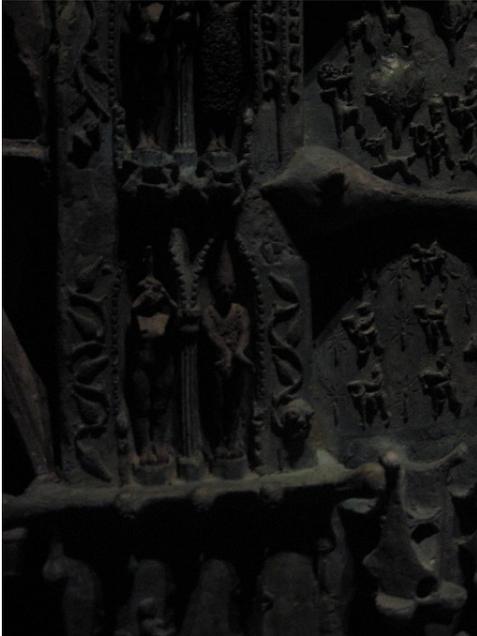
However, to my thinking, darkness should be contrasted with light. And clowns that are witty have a beating heart.

These photographs were taken by my poor old camera in very dim darkness, where no flash photography is permitted. The images are a bit blurry, but somehow that makes them more potent!

If you want to be intellectually challenged, and journey through galleries that are filled with warnings, uncertainty and darkness, check out Tim Shaw: Beyond Reason, which is now showing at the San Diego Museum of Art through February 24, 2019.



Middle World. Mixed media, 1989-Current, by artist Tim Shaw.



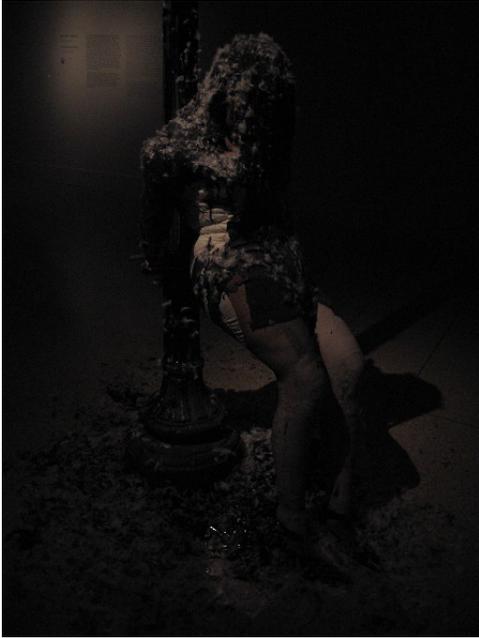
Ancient symbols and strange figures contained in Tim Shaw's Middle World.



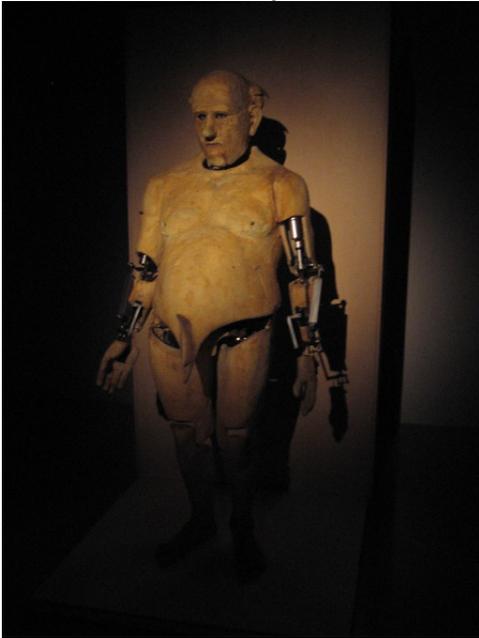
Mother, The Air Is Blue, The Air Is Dangerous, Working Drawing I. Ink, charcoal, and collage, 2015, by artist Tim Shaw.



Defending Integrity from the Powers that Be. Mixed media, 2017, by artist Tim Shaw.



Alternative Authority. Mixed media, 2017, by artist Tim Shaw.



The Birth of Breakdown Clown, an artificially intelligent, interactive, speaking robot by Irish sculptor Tim Shaw.

<https://coolsandiegosights.com/2018/10/28/a-dark-disturbing-look-at-art-beyond-reason/>