

Art museum's new exhibitions tackle history, violence and homelessness in 21st-century America

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In an era filled with social and political strife, art is a viable escape from the madness of living. Sometimes, however, contemporary artists choose a path of provocation all their own, reveling in the challenges and intricacies of 21st-century existence.

The Utah Museum of Contemporary Art in downtown Salt Lake City is not one to shy away from controversy. Its exhibitions often push the envelope by giving artists from around the world a unique platform for artistic representation. On Feb. 3, the museum unveiled five new exhibitions, which independently and collectively challenge viewers to consider their preconceived notions of art and, by extension, its overall purpose and effect on modern viewers.

The museum's sprawling main gallery is visible through large glass windows from the top floor. Descending a series of stairs, visitors are greeted by an expansive space laden with visual curiosities, perhaps none more curious and enticing than Rona Pondick and Robert Feintuch's dual exhibition "[Head, Hands, Feet; Sleeping, Holding, Dreaming, Dying.](#)" on display through July 15.

The exhibition combines Pondick's otherworldly sculptures with her husband Feintuch's whimsical paintings. The exhibition premieres at UMOCA before heading to the Bates Museum of Art in Maine, according to utahmoca.org.

The pair have been together since the mid-'70s and "share an interest in making work that uses the body to pursue psychologically suggestive meanings," according to UMOCA's news release.

Feintuch's paintings showcase human figures in untraditional poses, with their backs turned away from the viewer or with cropped views of human feet. As a painter, Feintuch was inspired during a trip to Italy, where he studied early Renaissance frescoes. His work, like the era from which he gleans encouragement, invites viewers to contemplate their relationship to the figure depicted in the painting. Feintuch's paintings relish in the sensation of movement, inciting a visual curiosity regarding the artist's use of perspective.

Pondick's sculptures are also inspired by perspective and bodily proportion. Spaced dramatically throughout the exhibition, her slickly polished animal-human hybrids are haunting.

Pondick uses herself as a model, casting her head, hands and limbs in a variety of contortions. Perhaps most visually fascinating, and indeed most disturbing, is the extent to which the human dimensions of these sculptures are exaggerated or diminished.

Pondick's "Cat" (stainless steel, 4½ x 33 x 14 1/8 inches, 2002-2005), a figure comprised of an over-exaggerated hand, exists alongside a tiny head and body, evoking uncomfortable connotations of deformity and defect, as well as toying with classical notions of sculptures with perfect human anatomical proportions.

The upper Street and Codec galleries are home to "[The Future Isn't What It Used to Be](#)," curated by Susan Caraballo and on display through May 13. Showcasing the work of artists Octavio Abúndez, Ananké Asseff, Donna Conlon, Jonathan Harker, Rosa Naday Garmendia, Gisela Motta, Leandro Lima, Stephanie Syjuco and Antonia Wright, this exhibition "examines violence and man-made atrocities, reflecting how the future before us looks bleak and far from what we had envisioned the 21st century to look like," according to UMOCA's [website](#).

Perhaps the most startling display in an art museum, Asseff's "Rueda de reconocimiento" (LineUp) invites viewers to enter the dark space of the Codec Gallery where they are greeted by a projected lineup of men, their backs turned away. After a few moments, two men swiftly turn and fire guns in the viewer's direction. Here, the artist hopes to remind viewers of the dangerous conditions of women and innocents throughout much of the world.

The A.I.R. Space gallery features artist Mary Rothlisberger's "[From Nothing to Nothing is No Time at All](#)," a collection of works such as written notes and textiles highlighting the artist's "investigations into the American landscape (that) chronicle her years on the road," according to the artist's biographical statement. The exhibit is on display through March 11.

In the museum's Projects Gallery, photographer Niki Chan Wylie and Salt Lake City Weekly writer Stephen Dark have collaborated to create a provocative and thought-provoking exhibition of portraits of homeless youth, titled "[Only God Can Judge Me](#)," on display through March 18.

Lastly, "[Imagining UMOCA](#)," on display through April 15, is a collaborative project led by Anne Mooney, associate professor at the University of Utah School of Architecture, in which architecture students craft proposals for expanding the museum's space as it contemplates a move to one of three downtown sites.