



Editor Tom Abate tom.abate@patch.com



Like 65

Arts

An Eclectic Showcase

Local artist Anne Pinkowski exhibits her collection of found objects and neon sculptures at Zocalo Coffehouse.

By [Lani Conway](#) | [Email the author](#) | January 14, 2011

Recommend 46

Tweet 0

Email

Print

7 Comments

Sand-filled Mason jars bound behind an interlace of wire. A copper-string guitar stuffed with eggs. Twisting neon tubes glowing with a florescent hue and laid within boxes fashioned from wood scraps.

This is San Leandro artist Anne Pinkowski's eclectic collection of found objects, paintings, and neon and plasma sculptures, which will hang from the gallery walls of [Zocalo Coffeeshouse](#) until Jan. 29.

It's immediately apparent that Pinkowski's skillfully crafted collection employed strategic resourcefulness and a predisposition for bold experimentation: Black plastic lobsters, canvas scraps, miniature president figurines, oversized drill bits, matches and plastic doll heads acquired from local flea markets and garage sales are paired together to produce work that gives a nod to the humorous and offbeat.

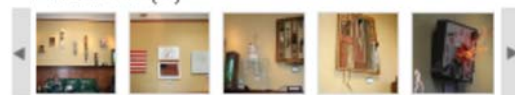
"My impetus is toward preserving things that people chuck away and hoping that somebody will appreciate these objects not just as garbage, but as things that were actually a part of somebody's life," Pinkowski said on a busy Monday morning at Zocalo.

Most of her sculptures are part of the collection "Objects from an Artist's Studio," which she made for a recent group art show at the [Temescal Arts Center](#).

Pinkowski claims she never planned on becoming an artist, nor ever imagined she would come to display her work at Zocalo — her first ever solo art show.



PHOTOS (6)



Upload Photos and Videos

These things just happened through the relationships she has kept throughout the years with mentors and artists.

Encouragement from her high school art teacher and from assemblage artist George Herms, who taught at the University of California Los Angeles when Pinkowski studied fine art photography there, motivated and inspired her to further explore and develop her artistically-inclined talents.

At [The Crucible](#) educational foundry in Oakland, Pinkowski painstakingly bends, twists and fuses pieces of glass tubes through a combination of advanced techniques that include hand torches, blow hoses, metal weights and a lot of patience.

"When working with neon tubes, everyone wants it perfectly straight as if a machine made it," Pinkowski said. "That's not interesting because a machine can make anything totally perfect. I like knowing that things take skill."

That skill shows in "Bells and Whistles," "Neon Twist" and "The Life That Binds Us" — simple titles that fail to fully encapsulate such a large stretch of imagination and originality.

"I think there is a certain whimsy in my work that people who aren't accustomed to my style can appreciate," Pinkowski said. "There is a certain storytelling element to it."

Despite the industrial nature of her work, there is still the image of an 18th century apothecary or scientist experimenting with chemical elements. In her workshop, glass tubes are dipped in phosphor coating and pumped with various combinations of krypton, argon, neon gas or mercury. The result: colorful shades of pink, lavender, blues, reds and vibrant greens.

"It's such a geeky art," she said as she showed me photos on her iPhone of herself hard at work creating advanced neon lighting displays.

A handful of Pinkowski's acrylic on canvas paintings hang from the walls, but surprisingly, she revealed a strong aversion to that craft. "I hate painting," she said. "I hate, I hate, I hate it."

Nevertheless, the paintings, some of which are several decades old, offered a good medium at the time to present social commentary and reflections on the state of the world.

There's "Spin the Bottle," a tongue-in-cheek sort of exploration into historic presidential indiscretions; "American Flag," which portrays moral and political dissatisfaction; and "Paint by Numbers," a depiction of the loss of American values.

Since the start of the exhibition in late December, Pinkowski has received positive feedback from coffee shop patrons and locals alike.

"Most people's work that we display is either dramatically great or dramatically not," said Zocalo owner Tim Holmes.

"Anne's work is great and has had a ton of positive feedback. People are even taking pictures with it."

Like most artists, Pinkowski would like to make her art a full time undertaking one day, but she understands the economic realities such a decision would signify.

For now, vacations and weekend breaks from her day job as an IT manager at Stanford University, which she fully enjoys, will have to suffice.

"Most people find it hard to see me as a creative person when I have a professional career," she said. "They think of me as an academic, a professional and computer person, but never as an artist."

"I respond by asking them, 'Why are you so surprised? Why wouldn't I do art?'"