

UCSD's Stuart Collection inaugurates its 10th work in nine years, a fountain by Michael Asher

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UCSD'S STUART COLLECTION INAUGURATES ITS 10TH WORK IN NINE YEARS

A granite drinking fountain by a Los Angeles artist, Michael Asher, has become the tenth sculptural work to be created for the Stuart Collection at the University of California, San Diego.

The piece will be inaugurated at a reception for the artist, at 5 p.m. Tuesday, April 14. The work is located on the grassy mall that divides Myers Drive, in the Matthews Administrative and Academic Complex (MAAC) area.

Prior to the reception, the artist will introduce his sculpture in a talk at 4 p.m., in the Center for Research and Computing in the Arts, 408 MAAC (formerly the Center for Music Experiment), on Russell Drive, one block east of Myers Drive. The two events are free and open to the public.

The untitled fountain is an accurate representation of a commercial indoor water cooler, similar to those found on school campuses, in business offices and in government facilities.

Instead of its usual context as an interior institutional fixture, the fountain is placed, monument-like, among trees, and reminders from the campus' previous occupants, the U.S. Marine Corps. The fountain shares the area with a large granite landmark, which commemorates the old U.S. Marine facility, and a flagpole with benches situated around its base.

The area the campus now occupies was once Camp Matthews, an artillery and rifle range that was especially active during World War II. The facility was given over to the UC System in 1964. Until only a few years ago, spent shell casings could still be found on the grassy mall area, which was once the location of a firing range.

According to Mary Beebe, director of the Stuart Collection, water fountains have served as public monuments in cultures throughout the world. "Asher's work, though, is far from traditional," she said. "The artist has projected several cultural references into one modest object. Asher chose this site for his work in order to make us think about the university's role, not only as an educational institution, but also within the context of the larger community.

"Moreover," she said, "the drinking fountain serves as a reminder that Southern California needs to manage and preserve its natural resources in light of the ongoing water crisis caused by drought, and large-scale agricultural and urban development."

Asher's work takes its place on the UCSD campus among other site-specific sculptural works by the artists Niki de Saint Phalle (The Sun God, 1983); Robert Irwin (Untitled, 1983); Richard Fleischner (The La Jolla Project, 1984); Terry Allen (Trees, 1986); Nam June Paik (Something Pacific, 1986); Ian Hamilton Finlay (UNDA, 1987); Bruce Nauman (Vices and Virtues, 1988); William Wegman (La Jolla Vista View, 1988) and Jackie Ferrara (Terrace, 1991).

Alexis Smith's Snake Path, a winding, tiled walkway leading up to the UCSD Central Library, is under construction. It will be the eleventh work to become part of the Stuart Collection, and will be presented to the public later this year.

Michael Asher was born in Los Angeles in 1943. He has exhibited throughout the United States and Europe, and has taught at the California Institute of the Arts, in Valencia, since 1973.

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