

**It's always an adventure:
A diverse and conundrum-filled exhibit by Don Suggs at Otis College fosters a sense of discovery.**

By David Pagel, Special to The Times

For the last 40 years, Don Suggs has not discouraged the notion that his art is all over the place. He has used oil, alkyd and acrylic, on canvas, panel and paper, to paint landscapes, portraits and abstractions. He has built towering sculptures from hundreds of plastic cups, souvenir mugs and pet toys; made drawings in graphite and ink; taken his own photographs and recycled found images to piece together collages. He has dipped into styles even more far-flung, including Photo-Realism, Cubism, Conceptualism, Surrealism, Symbolism, Pop, Minimalism, Assemblage, Appropriationism, Dada and Abstraction, both hard-edge and gestural.

At Otis College of Art and Design's Ben Maltz Gallery, "Don Suggs: One Man Group Show" plays up the disparate nature of his polyglot art. Organized by gallery director Meg Linton and artist and critic Doug Harvey, the

jampacked installation mixes and matches approximately 85 large, small and medium-size works made from 1969 through 2007. The big, sky-lighted gallery is transformed into a carnivalesque parade of media and techniques, pictures and things, colors and textures, styles and substances.

Visitors who love to get lost in details are provided with an abundance of them. Seven sofa-scale paintings from the early 1980s, including "Asuncion," "Sculptor's Game" and "Place of Forgetting," fracture the picture-plane into clashing fragments. In three photo-collages from the late 1990s, "Venice Walk," "Odd Man" and "Physics of Light," the visible world splinters into shards, creating a turbulent to-and-fro between objects and perceptions of them.

The complexity of Suggs' art makes an adventure of every visit, fueling one's sense of discovery and inviting further exploration. Every time you turn your head, there is something new to see: 25 lima beans glued to an aerial photograph of suburbs or brightly colored plastic serving dishes nestled inside one another to form super-size blossoms Suggs calls "Fleurs du Mall." Every path through the gallery feels off the beaten path, far from the streamlined, prepackaged experiences mainstream culture serves up.

Suggs is a nooks-and-crannies artist, an astute observer with his nose to the ground and his mind fascinated by odd parallels and unexpected connections among disparate styles and systems of organizing. Almost all of his works combine one or more modes of representation -- signs, symbols, logos, language and realistic depiction. Many work at cross purposes, canceling out some elements and drawing viewers in by requiring leaps of the imagination.

Viewers are invited to figure things out for themselves. There's plenty to ponder and no shortage of befuddling conundrums, which seem to be Suggs' specialty. His art incites conversation: It makes you want to nudge strangers and share what you have discovered.

It also appeals to the less gregarious. Visitors who prefer to stand back and survey the whole, encapsulating its myriad details in an overview, are rewarded.

The quick gestures that animate seven drawings from the early 1970s, including "Pieta," "Swastika" and "Flaming Pig Head and Pickle" are reprised, with more muscularity, in five drawings on a panel from 2004. In other works, themes and moves echo one another, generating a lively rhythm that holds the show together.

What happens between bodies of work also happens within individual pieces. The principle underlying each is that no work is governed by a single principle. At least two systems or sorts of logic operate within, which puts a priority on skepticism and the ability to see things from more than one point of view.

At a time when the sheer volume of information available seems to swamp the individual's capacity to synthesize and discriminate -- to think -- "One Man Group Show" stands out. It is a testament to open-minded curiosity and patient deliberation, to the value of individual activity in the face of all sorts of collective chicanery.



Fleurs du Mall #5



Venice Walk