

Capturing Community: Marinella Senatore at the Museum of Contemporary Art

An exhibition by European community artist Marinella Senatore at the Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara has become a platform for individuals and groups to interact creatively with her work in MCA's space. Everything from dance to poetry reading and writing to movie making is taking place on this new interactive stage.

One of the groups that caught and embraced Senatore's creative spark, when she visited their classroom at UCSB, was Daniel Wuebben's academic writing students. They visited MCA and responded with the following story and photos. - Kerry Methner / CASA

Story by **Becca Schwartz**
With contributions from **Nicholas Gigliotti**
Photos by **Sarah Pham**

AN ELUSIVE BLUE MIST veils her face as she stares at the sheet cradled between her palms. The adjacent screen depicts an elderly man, sporting a scholarly sweater, presumably a professor, the clock behind his exuberant face reads 9:12, and the darkness that seeps through the window pane signals the day has ended but he still passionately pontificates. The third and final screen illuminates a circle of four individuals sitting pensively, examining a figure collapsed upon the floor. They seem to grieve in the dreary room, wallpapered with tiles separated by corroding grout, and



A conglomeration of head phones and newspapers blanket the table which hosts and inspires visitors' contributions.

anchored by splintered black floorboards.

Beyond this triangle of somber-toned screens, a circle of computer monitors that depict joyous activities—rehearsed dance, cultural rituals, and synchronized swimming—in which a multitude of bodies seemingly morph into a single being, diving in practiced artistic strokes. The room offers an interesting juxtaposition: a rim of seamless harmony, contrasted by the dark, inescapable, triangular core.

These screens and juxtapositions reflect the beautiful, thought-provoking poetry of acclaimed artist Marinella Senatore in her *Building Communities*, which is on display at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Santa Barbara through August 17th. Based in Berlin, Senatore is renowned for her

participant-driven artwork. A mosaic of film, writing, and photography, *Building Communities* is an ever-evolving compilation of contributing visitors—literate and illiterate, current and past, established and aspiring. Her technique asserts audience members

as key protagonists, furnishes inspiration from around the globe, and harnesses creativity into an adaptive mural.

As Sophie Leddick, Director of



UCSB writing students mimic the pose artistically portrayed in the exhibit's opening mural.



Piccolo Caos (Little Chaos), 2013, by **Marinella Senatore**. Fine art print on Hahnemühle paper, 63x118", Courtesy the Artist & Peres Projects, Berlin

“profile pictures” and crafting statues for imagined “walls.”

Madeline Dahm, a sophomore at UCSB sitting on the red dance floor surrounded by her classmates explained, “I didn't know what to expect. We came with small, unfinished ideas and hoped these small ideas would come together to create an art piece. Looking around the museum revealed that visualization and a sense of abstractness was crucial.”

In this way, Senatore's platforms not only inspire

Community Engagement at the MCA explains, “Marinella is pushing the boundaries of art with a bottom-up approach, she doesn't let it come to her, she seeks it out and creates a constant interaction with participants which embodies the essence of the work. She works with people on the human level through story-telling. They narrate their life, which is the art.”

At the entrance to the MCA, two massive photographs of participants clad in flamboyant garments narrate the art captured by Senatore's camera. In the first, the individuals are scattered, almost as if they are liting effortlessly on the wind. In the second, they form a loosely bound circle and, with solemn stares, grab at a woman who stands strong in the center. Another small adjacent room features a film written and produced by a group of miners in rural Italy whom Senatore inspired. A final room hosts a single large table that guards a collection of sketches and creative prose written by individuals who once sat there, consumed by insight. Visitors to the ever-adapting exhibit are invited to approach the table and leave an offering from their own imaginations.

I visited the MCA with a group of my peers from Daniel Wuebben's Academic Writing class at UCSB. In groups of three or four, we engaged in a variety of platforms, ranging from filming a catalog describing “beauty” in a variety of languages to producing a fake social media hub by drawing sketched

onlookers to create, but also offer an intriguing contrast in every facet of her work: the dichotomy of order in disorder. A film forged by miners, beautiful photography capturing human movement and geometric shapes, and the main room—a stark juxtaposition of perfect choreography and absolute despair transcending the abyss.

In her role as the artist, Senatore offers tools that encourage creative passion to ignite and allows her own conviction to be that of her patrons. Senatore's art serves to expose the beating heart that resides in all societies, the anecdotes that spawn collective histories, the mirror that echoes the minds that dare gaze upon their reflections. *Building Communities* creates a melting pot of stories that represents both the tacit and explicit features of a given society, integrated in a global context.

MCA is located at 653 Paseo Nuevo (2nd level). Visit online at www.mcasantabarbara.org or reach them at 966-5373.



UCSB writing students interacting with Senatore's exhibition

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