

Mary Carol Kenney: *A Delicious Torment*

By ERIN J. SMITH / CASA

WITH LUSCIOUS COLORS AND SENSUOUS FORMS, Mary Carol Kenney's artwork depicts unusual nudes in portrait-style paintings now on exhibit at CASA Magazine through the month of November.

Figures, a one woman show, represents Kenney's work in oil over the last two years. "When I first started painting, I had several shows right away," said Kenney, who is also a sculptor. "Lately, I've been focusing more on the artwork. But this came at a time when I felt like I had enough for a show."

Kenney moved to Santa Barbara from Bloomington, Indiana in 2002. "The minute I was here a light went on I had never experienced," she said. "I just love it here. I love the color, the vibrant community."

Growing up, Kenney had limited exposure to

art classes, so she has found her own way.

"I never excelled in very much except art, but I didn't get a lot of support in that," she said. Kenney attended a Catholic all girls school in Indianapolis and attended Herron School of Art and Design at Indiana



Mary Carol Kenney

University-Purdue University Indianapolis. "I had false starts with painting," she said. "I got married and had kids. Any time I wanted to feel like anything but a milk machine, I'd take my box of paintings out from under my bed and say to myself, 'I'm an artist too.'" Tragically, Kenney's house burned down, destroying her box of paintings: "I didn't have any evidence I was an artist. When



Close Distance, 40x40" by Mary Carol Kenney



A Different Kind of Marriage, 40x40" by Mary Carol Kenney

my kids grew up, I took some classes," she said. "It wasn't until I moved to Santa Barbara that I was able to break through." Kenney learned to sew as a young child and is a master seamstress. She has utilized her artistic sensibilities in custom home décor sewing for decorators. Now she makes her living equally between sewing and selling her artwork. "I have a great studio. Every minute I can spare, I go to the studio. Even a really frustrating day, it's 'Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!' I can't find anything wrong with it."

Kenney has found a mentor in Rick Stitch, a local artist who teaches through SBCC's Adult Education program. "He said to me, 'You're a painter.' He is the most encouraging person – the kind of teacher who sees where you're headed and pushes you there. We're so lucky to have access to that kind of talent."

In this collection of figurative oil paintings, Kenney has been trying not to get too caught up in perfecting the exact details of the person she's painting, but rather to capture the complex emotions they express—a challenge Kenney relishes as an artist. "If I try to get a painting to look too realistic, I haven't left the freshness in—I end up ruining a lot of paintings," she said.

Kenney holds salons at her home where she and a few other artists work from live models. The paintings are layered with symbols that have special meaning for Kenney, like an antique wedding kimono her parents brought her from Japan and the "divorce quilt" Kenney made. To create these paintings, she'd have the models dress in the kimono while thinking about marriage, and then express that through the figure's posture. "People change so much between expressions, between sessions," she said. "We're programmed to recognize people's faces, but there are other ways to recognize people, emotionally, sensually."

CASA is located at 23 E Canon Perdido St. For more information, call 965-6448.