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Silicon Valley



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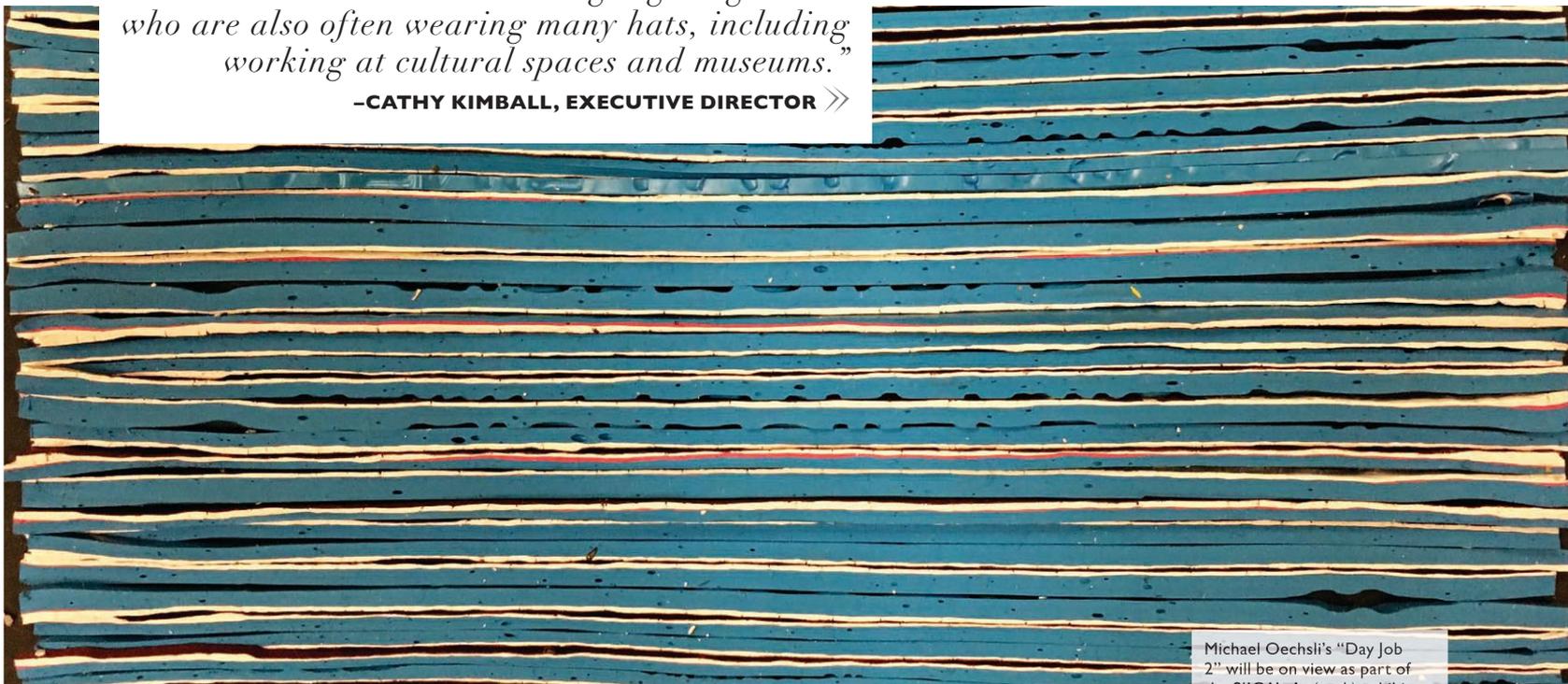
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« “Part of SJICA’s mission is to support emerging artists and their growth. This exhibition aims to do that: highlighting artists who are also often wearing many hats, including working at cultural spaces and museums.”

—CATHY KIMBALL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR »



Michael Oechsli’s “Day Job 2” will be on view as part of the SJICA’s *Art(work)* exhibit, highlighting pieces by the museum’s own preparators.

ROLE REVERSAL

With a new SJICA show, art preparators go from behind the scenes to front and center. —Sheryl Nonnenberg

If you have ever struggled to hang a picture on a wall—finding the right frame and hardware, placing it so it is even and secure—you can appreciate the talents of the museum preparator. These are the folks who make sure that displays are seen in the best possible manner in order to enhance the viewer’s experience and to highlight the art. Many are artists themselves. And with the recent opening of *Art(work)*, which runs through June 3, four of them are now taking center stage at the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art (sjica.org). “Part of SJICA’s mission is to support emerging artists and their growth,” says Executive Director Cathy Kimball, who originated the idea for the show. “This exhibition aims to do that: highlighting artists who are also often wearing many hats, including working at cultural spaces and museums.”

Michael Oechsli, Damian Kelly, Martie Guile and Cynthia Cao work full or part time at the SJICA and also meet after hours to create their own art. Oechsli, who has

been the installation and facility manager for 10 years, is showing a collection of paintings/assemblages that were “inspired by and made out of remnants of previous SJICA installations and exhibits,” he says. Additionally, he has a suite of prints—monotypes on homemade palm-tree paper—on view. Kelly devised a large-scale, draped wall piece embedded with “symbols [that] relate to an imagined preparator culture,” he says. Guile notes that her work “is the output of what I have collected from my experience as a preparator.” She fashions brushes from leftover materials—such as sanding sponges, wood, scouring pads—and uses them to paint on pieces of cardboard and canvas. Cao, who says she is “particularly interested in art-handler mathematics”—the innumerable measurements taken with each work of art—is exhibiting a series of small prints and watercolors.

All four agree that they derive many benefits from their day jobs: being inspired by other artists and gaining insight into other types of practices and processes, as well as the very practical, hands-on experience of handling art. (According to Cao, there is even a “meditative” aspect to the most mundane task: repairing hundreds of tiny holes in the wall.) While each has shown work independently, *Art(work)* offers a chance to join forces in a thematic way. “There is a lot of collaboration involved in installing a show,” explains Oechsli, “so we carried that over to this exhibit as well. A lot of the art has been created in a group setting at different times over the last year in the gallery.” For someone accustomed to toiling behind the scenes, he continues, “it is an absolute dream to be a featured artist in an SJICA exhibition.”

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST