

Everything is Possible, Nothing is Probable The Legacy of the Candy Store Gallery

The 1960s were a potent and innovative time for art making in the Central Valley and Northern California. A new generation of talented art faculty at California State University, Sacramento (then Sacramento State College) and the University of California, Davis pushed beyond the dominant Abstract Expressionist style into fresh territory of representational and figurative work replete with humor and an irreverent attitude all its own. Amid this fervent creativity emerged a small but unique gallery supporting regional artists. Adeliza McHugh opened the Candy Store Gallery in Folsom, California in October 1962. An unassuming, grandmotherly woman with little professional art experience, McHugh had at first tried her hand at opening an actual candy store, but when shut down by the health department, turned her attention to launching an art gallery. For the next thirty years, the Candy Store Gallery, with McHugh at its helm, would be a fixture within the Sacramento region, supporting a cadre of artists, enticing collectors, and fostering a community.

Many of the artists championed by McHugh were faculty members at Sacramento State. Irving Marcus was one of the founding artists, first exhibiting his paintings at the gallery in 1962. Jack Ogden, encouraged by Marcus, followed in 1965. Other Sacramento State professors were also invited to show their work in those early years, notably Ruth Rippon and Robert Else, followed later by Joan Moment in 1974. McHugh's initial tastes in art were more tempered, albeit the work needed to be bold in content and execution.

As McHugh further developed her artistic eye, she became enamored with the artists associated with Funk, a label bestowed by art historian Peter Selz in a sculpture exhibition at the Berkeley Art Museum in 1967. These artists included Robert Arneson, David Gilhooly, and Roy De Forest, who were part of the dynamic faculty at UC Davis. Their work was "loud, unashamed and free," as Selz described it, more an attitude than a movement.¹¹ McHugh too embraced this maxim and would exhibit many of the Funk artists for decades.

From 1965 onward, the Candy Store Gallery artist roster flourished. McHugh featured the work of Maija Peeples-Bright and Clayton Bailey, also associated with UC Davis, who along with De Forest labeled their work Nut Art to differentiate it from Funk. Nut Art embraced painting as well as sculpture, but retained the vibrant, off-beat aesthetic that the Candy Store would become known for. Other artists not aligned with Funk or Nut Art, including Sandra Shannonhouse and Don Reich were also featured at the gallery.

In a synergistic move, Irving Marcus was appointed chair of the Art Department at Sacramento State in 1966, and with the support of Dean Harvey Reddick he dramatically expanded the art faculty from thirteen to thirty. This included the hiring of artist Jim Nutt, a member of the Hairy Who, a self-named group of six artists from Chicago. Nutt was accompanied by his wife and Hairy Who member Gladys Nilsson and they in turn invited Karl Wirsum, another member, to join them in California. Like the Funk artists, the Hairy Who had an unbridled approach to art with a freewheeling style inspired by comics, advertisements, and pornography. Both Funk and the work of the Hairy Who fostered an idiosyncratic sense of humor imbued with spontaneity, wordplay, puns, and inside jokes that often belied their transgressive subject matter. McHugh was quick to absorb Nutt, Nilsson, and Wirsum into the Candy Store stable.

The draw and magic of the Candy Store was the generative community it created. Not only did professors from Sacramento State and UC Davis exhibit their work, but they encouraged and invited their students as well. Suzanne Adan, Michael Stevens, and Nate Shiner, students of Nutt and Nilsson, were featured at the Candy Store. Peter VandenBerge, Arneson's first graduate student at UC Davis, who would go on to teach at Sacramento State for over thirty years, exhibited at the gallery regularly through the 1980s. Arthur Gonzalez, having studied at both Sacramento State and UC Davis, had what he describes as his first show in the kitchen at the Candy Store. An unofficial exhibition as it was, Gonzalez still includes it on his resume, a tribute to the enduring impact of McHugh and the Candy Store. For many—artists, collectors, even unsuspecting passersby—the Candy Store offered a homelike and welcoming environment to enjoy art, conversation, and to feel a part of something bigger.

Art historian John Fitz Gibbon aptly described the significance of these artists and this moment of artistic verve:

The art of Northern California, especially work coming out of Sacramento State (and from these neighborly fields of shared spiritual vision at Davis) has always been about the chances for a better society and the possibility, at this late date, for a personal salvation. Rather than with merely formal questions, Sacramento art deals with what counts and what doesn't; it is about looking out for the wrong turns, it is about seeing what is inevitable, it is about how to keep a clear mind in a decaying body.^[2]

The legacy of the Candy Store Gallery and its importance to Sacramento State, our region, and art history lives on through the artworks we are so fortunate to steward in the Sacramento State Art Collection. On the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the Candy Store Gallery, the University Galleries at Sacramento State, in conjunction with the Crocker Art Museum and their current exhibition *The Candy Store: Funk, Nut & Other Art with a Kick*, celebrate the unique vision of Adeliza McHugh and the artists who dared to think everything was possible, even if nothing was probable.

The University Galleries would like to thank the following lenders to the exhibition: The Crocker Art Museum, Joan Moment, Sandra Shannonhouse, and the Estate of Robert Arneson. A special thanks to Scott Shields, Chief Curator at the Crocker, for inviting the University Galleries to participate in this momentous project; Tatum DeMarco, Curatorial Assistant, for her detailed research over the last 18 months; Mustafa Shaheen, Galleries Coordinator, for assisting with coordination and planning; and Ben Hunt, who tirelessly contributed his art handling and installation skills to realize this exhibition.

-Kelly Lindner, Curator

Notes

1. Peter Selz for the *Funk* exhibition catalogue, Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1967.

2. John Fitz Gibbon in "Art by Jon Fitz Gibbon," p. 5. This quote comes from an extended draft essay for *California Connections: Sacramento State College: The Early 1970s*. Sacramento, CA: California State University, Sacramento, 1982. California State University, Sacramento, Donald and Beverly Gerth Special Collections and University Archives.