



SEE IT | ART

Masquerade parade

Artist Naida Osline's people-watching-by-Polaroid offers an intriguing look at identity and expression.

BY JIT FONG CHIN

As a public-events supervisor for the city of Huntington Beach, Naida Osline does a lot of people watching at parades, festivals and beach events.

Seven years ago, she started snapping Polaroids of people in costumes, and then went to comic and sci-fi conventions to get even more pictures.

Sixty-seven of these photos are now on display at The Office gallery, arranged in groupings like Elvises and zombies. Not all disguises are costumes - some show people with medical devices like bandages.

The goal is to get pictures that show "layering of identity, something that documents an exaggeration in a way," Osline said.

Osline grew up in Fullerton and now lives in Huntington Beach with her husband, curator Tyler Stallings, and their cat. As an artist, she's better known for darker, freaky images of manipulated body parts. We chatted with her in her tidy City Hall office, which, by the way, displays just two photos - one shows rocks spelling out the couple's initials on the sand; the other was taken in front of fun-house mirrors and shows the bespectacled couple with comically distended heads. >>



SqueezeOC: Why did you decide to take the photos mug-shot style?

Naida Osline: When you take a police mug shot or a driver's license photo those aren't really intended to be art. It's supposed to be just neutral. It's not photographing someone to try to get to their soul. It's merely photographing them in a neutral way, their faces, the surface application, what's on their faces. It's a document.

SqOC: How many of these photos do you have now?

Osline: I framed 80 for the show, and I ended up using 67. I probably have another 80. It's like a faux science, like an anthropology project where I'm categorizing things together. There's the nature girls, or the warriors, the male bunnies.

SqOC: And it's funny because you see these guys with the fangs, and below them you see the people with the bad teeth. They're so similar, and yet the kind of image they bring across is so different. I got startled when I thought about how much pop culture I've absorbed over the years. Just glancing at these disguises, like a big beard, and I can tell what the wearer is

trying to get at.

Osline: It's weird to just assume another identity like that. As an artist, I'm looking for things where neither identity seems to be complete.

You can see the person, but you can see the application as well, so it's not a complete transformation; it's like a merger of their identities. You don't believe the woman is a bee, but you can sort of think, maybe she could be a bee. It's believable in an old science-fiction movie way. You know it's fake, but you can believe it for a moment.

SqOC: What makes a costume great, as opposed to just OK?

Osline: I guess I'm not really looking for great costumes. I'm looking for those that have a homemade sense to them. If it's a really great costume, it feels too slick, too commercial. This is more like folk art. I'm looking for that hand ap-



Naida Osline

PHOTO COURTESY OF NAIDA OSLINE

plication, almost like a bad costume in a way. It has a sincerity about it, and corniness. I'm not necessarily making fun of people because I like that sincerity part of it, that they really spent that time to create the illusion.

SqOC: In your other work, like the image of giant eyeballs, feet with the thousand toes, you show a strong interest in how bodies can be transformed.

Osline: The Captiva work started this second body of work. I'm interested in the body as a site of transformation, and as a metaphor for ideas about transformation. When you look at a lot of the

"The Captiva Collection: Polaroids by Naida Osline"

Where: The Office – An Art Space, 5122 Bolsa Ave., Suite #110, Huntington Beach. Also featuring work by Jenna Gallemore.

When: Continues through June 23. Gallery open 1-5 p.m. Tuesday-Friday or by appointment

Info: 714-767-5861 or theofficeart.com
Cost: Free

work, it appears to be about things like cosmetic reconfiguration, or bio-engineering, or trauma, evolution.

SqOC: Where did this interest in bodies come from?

Osline: My parents immigrated from Sweden. We were a working-class family, never went to museums, no art in my family at all. I'm not really sure. I guess in a fundamental way, I've always felt aware of my physical body. I've always been interested in my own athleticism. I'm kind of

grossed out by my body; I think it's beautiful and hideous at the same time.

SqOC: What do you think about plastic surgery?

Osline: I'm not a purist. I think that if people want to make themselves look a way, they should do that. In fact, I think sometimes people aren't creative enough. Beyond just trying to look younger, or have something you think you're lacking, I think cosmetic surgery could be more creative, actually.

SqOC: Do you ever dress up?

Osline: I actually don't. I've got boxes of latex parts (for other photography projects). For me, I think I just don't have the time and energy. I prefer to be an observer. When I was a kid, I used to dress up for Halloween, but I was never anything. I would like comb my hair all over my face and put on some weird dress. I was this weird combination of stuff. ●

>> Meet more local artists at squeezeoc.com/goingout/arttheater/