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# Nothing Is Real: Art About Dreaming

Group Show 'Shapes of Surrealism' Graces and Mystifies Seimandi & Leprieur Gallery

By **Josef Woodard**  
Fri Apr 17, 2026 | 4:42pm

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"Toxic Tropic," 2022 by Pierre Roy-Camille | Photo: Courtesy

Thus far in its still *jeune* life, the impressively staged and operated Seimandi & Leprieur Gallery has hosted four exhibitions worth spending time with. The latest, *Shapes of Surrealism*, is the second and more dream-machined of the group shows, after last fall's *Whose Paradise?* The list so far also includes solo shows by Dora Vital and Ricardo Ozier-Lafontaine – the latter who shows a handful of pieces along with the main group exhibition at present.

Some inquiring minds might wonder: What is the origin of these intriguing but as yet familiar artists on view? Specializing in art from Martinique, where married owners Fanny Seimandi and Julien Leprieur lived for a decade before landing in Santa Barbara, the gallery is giving a ripe forum to a pocket of contemporary art that might otherwise remain obscure on the West Coast.

And all in a stylishly appointed gallery space on Anapamu Street. (For local historians among us, this is the former site of the noted '70s and early '80s-era folk club The Bluebird.)

*Shapes of Surrealism* is a mostly Martinique-connected gathering of artists whose work in various ways connect to the dream-leaning and rationality stretching concerns in artists dating back to the early 20th century but now a continuing thread of artistic thought. Think David Lynch, in modern terms.

Most prominently are the large paintings by Pierre Roy-Camille, informed by his studies of Indian embroidery and alternately referring to plant and urban life. Hanging in the gallery's front window, as a kind of welcoming vision, is "Grills," in which varicolored leaves meet urban fencing patterns that appear more decorative than repressive. Another boldly pattern-based painting, "Double Dragon," suggests a fleur-de-lis design gone rogue and "Toxic Tropic" finds a spiky palm lording over the foreground, with an oblique-tiled ceiling pattern overhead. One imagines a hotel in a remote tropical locale, with unstated intrigue lurking in the margins – an unmade film noir vibe.



"Vesuve," 2024 by Karine Taillame | Photo: Courtesy

By contrast, on the same wall, there hangs Karine Taillame's alluring "Vésuve." Her large square-format painting is a light-themed dreamscape image, related to landscape but freely departing from realism in its depiction. A high horizon line locks our senses into seeing the painting as an earth-based image, but the main body of the picture plane hosts mysterious bursts of orange and green, in paint surfaces turned tactile, on a stark white background.

Something is happening here, but what it is is not exactly clear. As in a dream.



"Le reve," 1988 by Anabel Guerrero | Photo: Courtesy



"Blue Square Studies," 2026 by Dora Vital | Photo: Courtesy

In this company of artists from afar, the one Santa Barbara-based visitor is Cynthia James, whose reality-elongating and transforming jungle and undersea scenes fit neatly into the show's premise. James draws on a unique oil-on-copper technique, giving her imagery an added sheen of uniqueness, by the standards of common painting effects. Known and dream-based scenes seamlessly mingle here: The inherently fantastical appearance of jellyfish, for one, intersects with worlds of her own devising.

In another medium entirely, photographer Anabel Guerrero – now Paris-based but a Martinique resident for many years – shows black-and-white prints. In photographs such as "The Dream (*Ultime Limbes*)," the artist imposes categorically surreal, blurred, and swiped image manipulations on images of female subjects. These images push at the edges of what the conscious mind knows to be rational and true. Or *thinks* it knows.

Vital returns, after earlier gallery appearances, with a set of oil pastel on paper pieces, which are simple études melding rectilinear forms with amorphous gestures in blue. On some level, these suggest Rorschach test blobs gone rogue. Or perhaps that's just a reflexive response and psychoanalytic mode we may find ourselves in, when grasping worlds and galleries where dreams are welcome.

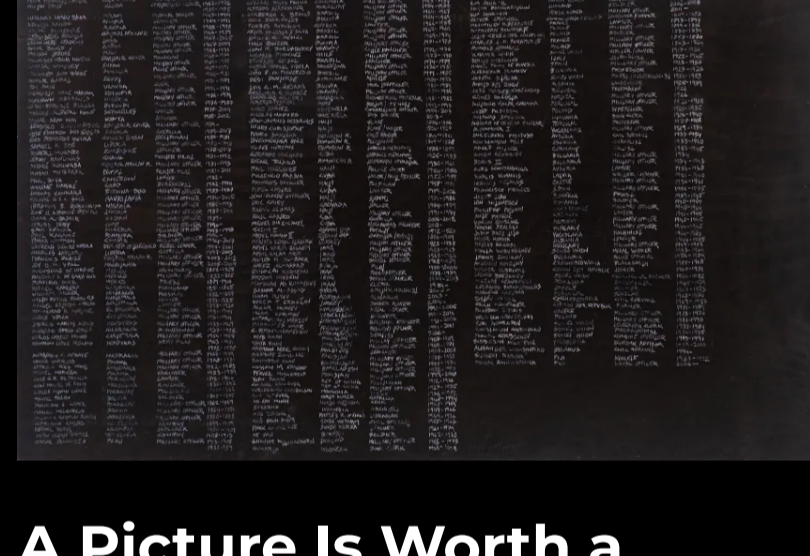
*Shapes of Surrealism* is on view at Seimandi & Leprieur Gallery, 33 West Anapamu Street, through May 31. See [seimandileprieur.com](http://seimandileprieur.com).



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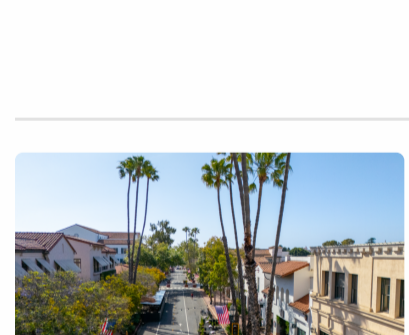
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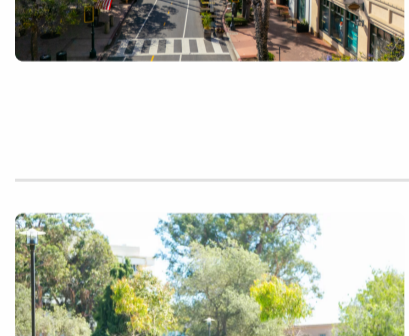
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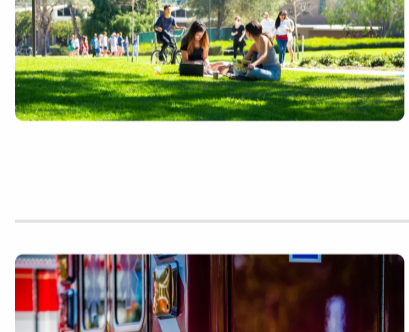
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