

Sandow Birk

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Museum gotta see 'um

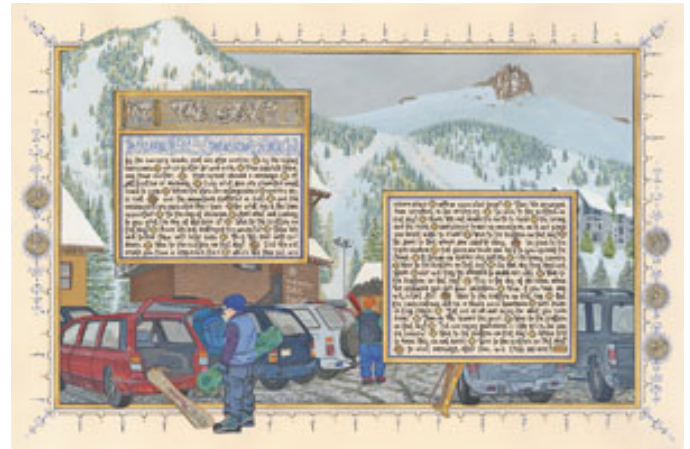
By Susan Cohn *Daily Journal* Senior Correspondent

SANDOW BIRK'S AMERICAN QUR'AN. Since 2001, Southern California artist Sandow Birk has been creating American Qur'an, a 240 panel series, hand-written in English in black ink and in calligraphy reminiscent of stylized graffiti, to illustrate the 114 suras (chapters) of the Quran with relevant scenes from contemporary American life. Previously completed portions of American Qur'an are on exhibit at the Warhol Museum in Pennsylvania. 25 newly finished sections are now on display at the Catharine Clark Gallery in San Francisco.

Gallery Owner Clark said, "Sandow's work in general often reflects on politics and on relevant issues at the moment the work is being created. After 9/11 there was understandably a lot of misinformation and confusion about Islam, and in Sandow's mind a lot of this stemmed from not being familiar with the Islamic religion. By re-presenting the texts from the Quran and pairing them with vernacular scenes from American life, Sandow has enabled viewers to come to the work with the possibility of understanding the Quran as they would any other written religious text. It is in turn as surreal, beautiful, archaic and relevant as the Torah or New Testament."

The Catharine Clark Gallery is located at 150 Minna St., San Francisco, near the Museum of Modern Art. For more information visit www.cclarkgallery.com or call (415) 399-1439. Sandow Birk: American Qur'an is shown through May 28.

SANDOW BIRK'S GREAT WAR OF THE CALIFORNIAS BROUGHT TO LIFE. Birk's epic, pseudo-historical series "In Smog and Thunder" describes the "Great War of the Californias" in which Los Angeles and San Francisco waged an all-out battle. His paintings, propaganda posters and etchings (and companion mockumentary) show the intense hatred that built up between the two great California cities and how, when the powder keg ignited, the state was quickly consumed in a bitter civil war. Four works from "In Smog and Thunder" come to life this summer as tableaux vivants ("living pictures") at the 2011 Laguna Beach Pageant of the Masters, where real people pose to look exactly like their counterparts in the original pieces.



Courtesy of Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco
 Sandow Birk. American Qur'an/Sura 77, 2011. Ink and gouache on paper.
 16 x 24 inches.

Pageant of the Masters Director Diane Challis Davy said, "I went to see Sandow's monumental exhibit "In Smog and Thunder" at the Laguna Art museum in the late 1990's. I was blown away by his inventiveness, his humor and the massive amount of work on display. I'd been hoping to include a sampling of the exhibit in our production ever since. Dan Duling (our scriptwriter) contacted him late last year and he graciously accepted our proposal. I think Sandow's work fits really well with this year's theme "Only Make Believe" and I can't wait to introduce his work to our audiences. I think they'll (the audience) be both delighted and surprised to see Sandow's modern masterwork represented in Pageant of the Masters." The Laguna Beach Festival of the Arts runs from July 7 through Aug. 31 with the 90-minute Pageant of the Masters starting nightly at 8:30 p.m. For information visit www.foapom.com or call (800) 487-3378.

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