

# Back to 'Collage'

William Dole lived, taught in Santa Barbara and built a reputation for his constructions

By Josef Woodard  
NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

In the ranks of internationally-circulating artists who have called Santa Barbara home for a substantial part of their lives, William Dole occupies a unique and rather paradoxical position: he looms large, but speaks softly. Such is the nature of his art, at once delicate on immediate impression and muscular beneath the surface.

Dole, the subject of a soft-spoken yet compelling exhibition at Patty Look Lewis Gallery, was born in Indiana and became a teacher at UCSB in 1949, helping to form its art department.

He passed on his wisdom to generations of students, while mastering his own aesthetic, having largely to do with a trend-busting fascination with the fine art of collage.

While Dole has had an underpinning presence in the Santa Barbara art scene throughout the past several decades, his work hasn't been granted much exposure in the years since his passing, in 1983.

There was a 1992 show at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, which owns its fair share of Dole's pieces. A Dole piece will pop up here and there, as it did in the recent show "1957," at Sullivan Goss (one of the more quietly fetching pieces in that show).

At Patty Look Lewis, the show is small but telling, a good primer in what makes Dole special. The exhibition goes by the title "Collage," which refers both to the medium

in which he was most famous, and to the larger definition of a collection of disparate pieces into a collage of a show.

In this case, the exhibition falls into three separate parts. On the back wall are several examples of his compact but powerful collages. Those centerpieces are flanked by spare and airy drawings from the late '50s and by a series of prints Dole did while in residence at the Tamarind Institute workshop at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1971.

From that series, Dole veered in different conceptual directions. The abstract impressions of atavistic black smears to color swatches appear in contrast to the composited, typically Dole-ish intrusion (a blithe intrusion) from the concrete world in the form of text scraps from newspapers and other sources.

Collage is one of those mediums, easy to do, surprisingly difficult to master. Dole was a master. As seen in the examples here, dating from between 1961 and 1982, Dole could launch tidy trajectories across cultures and history — from elegant Asian paper to scraps of Italian texts — and touch on many corners of the known and felt world. But that ambitious reach is conveyed with unpretentious ease. He had the eye for it.

A well-placed letter or fragment of text (often Italian) creeps into the picture and into our consciousness. Along with that cognitive layer, though, is an even stron-

## ART REVIEW

### William Dole, 'Collage'

**When:** Through Dec. 29

**Where:** Patty Look Lewis Gallery,  
25 East De La Guerra St.

**Hours:** Noon to 5 p.m.,  
Tuesday-Saturday

**Information:** 965-2525,  
www.pattylooklewis.com

ger appreciation for harmonies of color, shape and also the texture of different papers with different degrees of opacity.

In "Sign for an Icy Road," circa 1961, the vein-y Asian rice paper is nuanced with subtle random findings from the world, including a small postal stamp from Basel, Switzerland. Colors become protagonists, too, from the deep,

modulating red of "Adage" to the speckled olive green base of "Ergo," with text-based murmurings in the sensory periphery.

"Sequentia," from 1978, finds a minute, intricate and disarmingly organic-looking gridwork design, its uneven geometry punctuated by the soft machinery of letters and words we may not understand, but decidedly feel the weight of.

Dole had an uncanny, poetic way of referencing the worlds of exterior and interior experience, while pushing the collage medium to new heights.

All the while, the art world was making noisier assertions and rebellions and counter-rebellions. But Dole had his own agenda, and, at this juncture, it has beautifully withstood the test of time and the fickle tides of artistic fashion. ■



"Adage," by William Dole, is on display at Patty Look Lewis Gallery, in an exhibit named "Collage."

Patty  
**LOOK**  
Lewis  
Gallery