

Pencil me in for current Bedford exhibit

DOES ANYONE USE a pencil anymore, in this era of high-tech notes, design and illustration? Artists still do, and a touring exhibit at the Bedford Gallery in Walnut Creek, "Leaded," shows that they continue to find imaginative uses for the prosaic graphite pencil.

They work with soft, shiny graphite patterns that look like black pearls. They draw patterns, then erase another pattern through them. They meticulously hand-copy smudged prints from office copiers. They mix graphite powder with oil and resin to create rich, baroque designs.

On a larger scale, they build a towering, 7-foot-tall pencil sculpture that might be a neo-Gothic monument to Victorian clerks and accountants.

It's as if the exhibit's curator, N. Elizabeth Schlatter of the University of Richmond in Virginia, handed out pencils to a group of artists and said, "Show me what you can do."

A pencil drawing on plain white paper is a rarity among the 44 works in the show, which runs through Dec. 22. But the expansive installation and the black, white and gray images give the Bedford a particularly crisp, clean, uptown atmosphere.

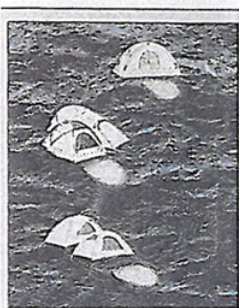
The constructions will attract the most attention. Tara Donovan uses the stubs of 17,000 pencils, varying in height, to create "Colony," which spreads across a 9-by-12-foot platform close to the floor.

"Colony" can be viewed from several angles, and it takes on varying forms — it might be a spreading amoeba, a ragged-edged island in a marshland, or in a small section, the miniaturized high-rise skyline of Hong Kong. Donovan's goal is for the assemblage of everyday objects to look different to every viewer.

Michael Galbreth and Jack Massing, known as the Art Guys, use thousands of sharpened No. 2 pencils (with what appears to be a cedar shaft) to build a fanciful ... something-



TARA DONOVAN used 17,000 pencil stubs for her "Colony," above; and Stephen Sollins obliterated most of an outdoor equipment catalog in "Terrain" (detail, above right). Both are on display at the Bedford Gallery.



GALLERIES

■ **BEDFORD GALLERY:** "Leaded" through Dec. 22, noon-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Sundays, 6-8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays and during performances at the Leshar Center for the Arts; \$2-\$3, free for Leshar Center ticket holders; 925-295-1417.

www.bedfordgallery.org.



ROBERT TAYLOR
In the Galleries

or-other. It could be the model for a skyscraper in the 1920s, a space-age emperor's palace, a Victorian plaything drawn from Gothic and Oriental vision.

In case we're taking "Bonded Ability #55 (Skyscraper)" too seriously, the Art Guys include an 8-foot-tall chart that suggests it's a parody of architectural competitions. It includes plans and sketches, ticket stubs to the Empire State Building observatory, and an old illustration of the Prince Albert memorial in London's Kensington Gardens. The caption calls it "one of the

world's worst monuments."

What might be called drawings in the exhibit are not just black-and-white.

Molly Springfield does great big drawings filled with what must have been agonizingly meticulous detail: pencil reproductions of the pages of book pages. There are folded pages, fragments of pages, collages of pages that might have come from a bad office photocopier. According to the exhibit notes, Springfield discovered in high school in Florida that she enjoyed hand-copying text more than she did writing it.

Mark Sheinkman's works look like time-exposure photographs of cigarette smoke, but they're swirling pencil drawings reduced with subtle erasure.

Stephen Sollins draws over pages of a catalog for outdoor gear, isolating a few tents and tent-camper as the only surviving illustrations. His soft, shiny graphite overlay covers the rest of the pages like flowing black lava.