

## SLO COUNTY ART SCENE

ADRIENNE ALLEBE:  
BETWEEN DREAMING AND WAKING

By Gordon Fuglie



**L**OS OSOS ARTIST ADRIENNE ALLEBE IS A HOMETOWN girl who refutes the familiar American nostrum “you can’t go home again.” The phrase derives from Thomas Wolfe’s novel whose plotline demonstrates that once you have left your small town or provincial backwater city for the sophisticated metropolis, you can’t return or re-integrate into the narrower confines of your previous way of life.

Born in Los Angeles, Allebe’s parents moved to the Central Coast in 1988 when she was nine. Reaching college age, she ventured south to UC Santa Barbara to study art and art history, earning the BA in 2001. Desiring a practical course of study in bio-medical illustration, she enrolled in graduate studies at CSU Long Beach,

which has one of the largest art departments in the CSU system. She earned the MFA in 2004.

But timing can be everything. While studying under “old school” bio-medical illustrators using traditional art tools, Allebe (pronounced All-ah-bee) discovered that long-venerated handwork was being supplanted by emerging digital media. Publishers increasingly were looking for “time and space” animation to dynamically portray organisms and human anatomy and this new technology held no interest for Allebe. So it was good-bye practical career skills, hello to fine art.

Adding painting and drawing to her curriculum at CSU Long Beach, Allebe obtained a hybrid art education encompassing traditional applied illustration, rendering, and color theory and painting. A fine art faculty member selected her for a teaching assistant, giving the young artist valuable experience in course preparation, pedagogy and constructive criticism.

Upon graduation in 2004, Allebe applied for teaching positions. Meanwhile, back in Los Osos, her parents saw a posting in *The Tribune* for the part-time art teaching pool at Cuesta College and forwarded the notice to their daughter. She applied and was immediately hired—going home again to contribute to the artistic life of students and the community. Allebe currently teaches two courses per semester, covering Beginning Drawing, 2-D Design, Art Appreciation and Portfolio Presentation. Four years after her Cuesta appointment, she also was hired to teach two courses per quarter in the Department of Art & Design, Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo—a locally rooted career.

As an emerging artist right out of graduate school, Allebe developed her style, a kind of Pop Art version of biomorphic surrealism, distinguished by eruptions of radiant artificial colors. Technically, she combines washes of liquid color (30%) with tightly rendered



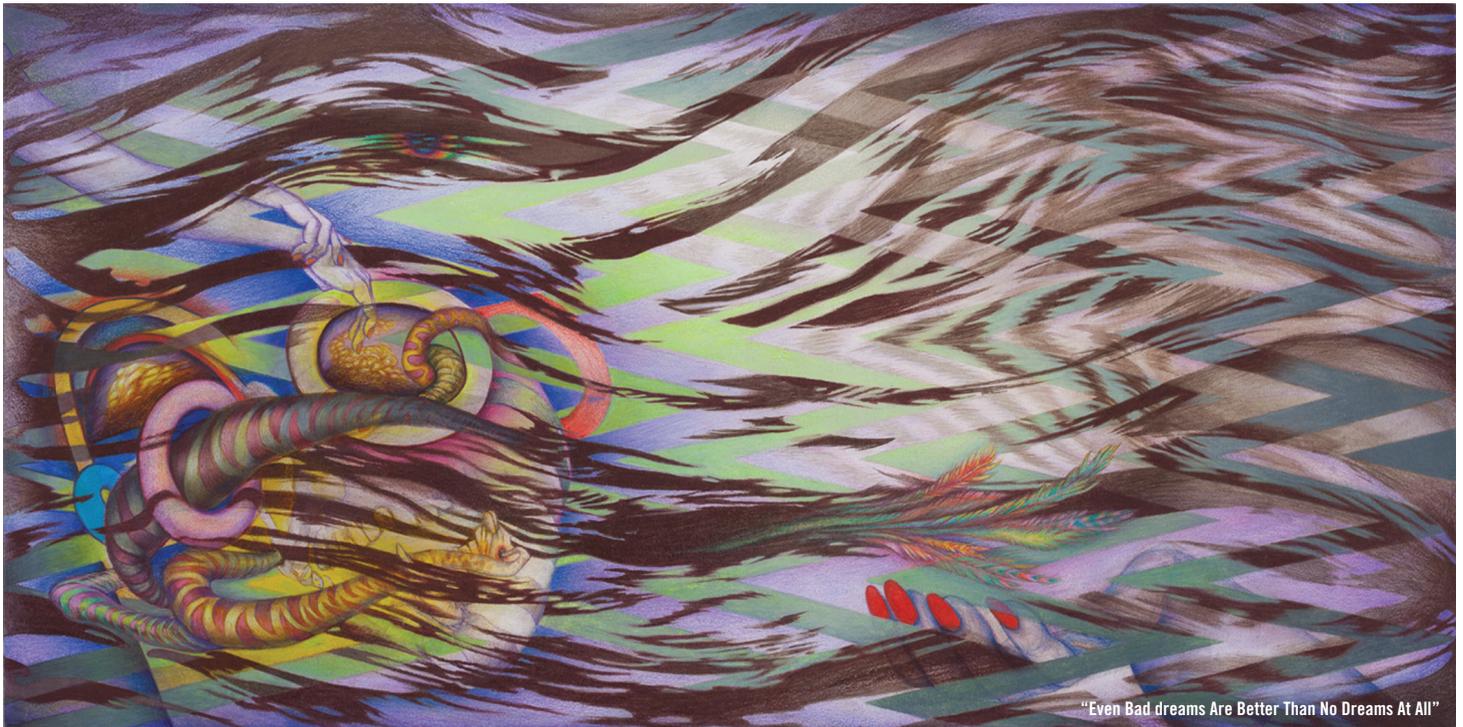
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"Even Bad dreams Are Better Than No Dreams At All"

Prismacolor pencil (70%) on paper. Her earliest works have an otherworldly landscape feeling, incorporating/combining various biological forms from nature. Allebe describes her work as a quest to fabricate a transformed world. She says this approach ultimately goes back to her childhood fascination with ghost stories, science fiction and horror movies—genres where reality is altered. As a teenage artist, she was fascinated by Salvador Dali, (1903-89), and also was spurred by the popular fantasy illustrations of Frank Frazetta (1928-2010).

Allebe, however, bypassed Frazetta's trademark barbarian warriors with steroid enhanced physiques, as well as his unsettlingly endowed, scantily clad, zaftig female subjects. Instead, she drew upon his tight

color coordination, sense of drama, fierce animals, elemental compositions and areas of explosive action. Viewing her earlier melodramatic and colorful works on her website can be something of a trip, and this experience might be best accompanied by listening to the electronic music of Tangerine Dream.

Allebe's most recent works have become more toned-down, shimmering, patterned visions that suggest dream states. *Even Bad Dreams are Better than No Dreams At All* is structured in a double pattern of fluid waves contrasted with rigid geometric zigzags. Disembodied female arms reach into the scene, perhaps the probings of the subconscious. A Frazetta-esque device of concentrated drama is at lower left, an egg/heart around which

writhes a serpent. Devotees of psychologists Sigmund Freud or Carl Jung could have a field day interpreting this anxious symbolically potent image.

In *Two Hearts Beat as One*, Allebe creates an imageless "dream field," leaving the viewer to impose his/her own vision upon the dynamic abstract composition. A rich brown pattern is overlain on a light tan background that is "spiced up" by flickering rose and orange hues that undulate across a screen of compressed triangles. In this work, the artist uses a liquid masking solution to create a phalanx of sinuous, ghostly, flame-like forms that dance across the picture plane. That *Two Hearts* has a meditative, trance-like feel is no accident.

Allebe told me her newest works seek a realm between life and death, an intuited spiritual zone. This direction was brought on by an untimely death in her family a few years back. It can be seen in her works from 2011, which have an iconic sensibility and are composed of intense spheres of luminosity and energy. One thing remains consistent from her earliest works to the present: an uncompromising devotion to craft and deep respect for her artistic media.

Later this year, Allebe's work will appear in "Thresholds," an artist-organized exhibition at the San Luis Obispo Museum of Art from October 4 – November 17. SLOMA is at 1010 Broad Street San Luis Obispo, CA 93401. [www.sloma.org](http://www.sloma.org).



"Two Hearts Beat As One"