



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
San Diego Public Library

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Ups and Downs of Life Revealed in John Daniel Abel Drawing Exhibition at Central Library
Images Were Recently Published in a Critically Acclaimed Book

SAN DIEGO – An unusual and thought-provoking exhibition of drawings by noted San Diego-area artist John Daniel Abel is on view in the Corridor Gallery of Central Library through March 29. Titled “The Last Word: 56 American Epitaphs,” the exhibition showcases forty original pen and ink drawings, primarily portraits. These were recently reproduced in a critically acclaimed book by the same title, written and illustrated by the artist. “The Last Word” art exhibition was organized by the library’s Visual Arts Program and is an adjunct to “The 44th Annual Local Authors Exhibit” which runs from January 31 to February 28. All of the works in “The Last Word” are for sale and the proceeds from the exhibition will be divided between the Visual Arts Program and the San Diego Art Institute. The book is also available for purchase through the Library. The Corridor Gallery is on the second floor of the Central Library of the San Diego Public Library, located at 820 E St. in downtown San Diego. Library hours are Mondays and Wednesdays, noon to 8 p.m.; Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and Sundays 1 to 5 p.m. For more information, the public can call Library Curator Mark-Elliott Lugo at (619) 238-6627.

Abel is a unique figure on San Diego’s art scene. Over the years his works have ranged from dark, austere landscapes whose forms are rendered with minimal detail, to haunting social realist narratives depicting the plight of those living on the fringes of society. Above all, Abel is an accomplished illustrator, draftsman, and teacher with primary interests in figuration and human behavior. If it’s colorful or eccentric, flawed or painful, Abel is fascinated.

Abel’s book and the exhibited drawings are the culmination of a project that took him more than a decade to complete. His characters are composites of real and imagined Americans of all ages, races, economic levels, and religions. As Abel envisioned them, they lived and died under a wide variety of circumstances, and all had stories to tell. Given Abel’s empathy for common people grappling with inner demons, or enduring or rising above adverse circumstances

– **more** –such as abusive spouses, the ravages of war, terminal illness, poverty, depression, and

social and racial ostracism, his images are simultaneously poignant and grotesque, humorous and tragic. Instigators are given a voice alongside victims, but it is themes of redemption, self-realization, and regret that are the most touching.

Abel executed the “Last Word” drawings in his signature style which incorporates elements of cartooning, classic draftsmanship, caricature, and etching. However, as skillfully and insightfully rendered as his subjects are, they are brought to life by the text accompanying them. For example, Abel named each character and assigned birth and death dates. But it is the epitaphs he penned for his creations that add an extraordinary dimension to this body of work. Modeled after ancient Greek poetry, these epitaphs are uncannily insightful at summarizing their subjects’ existences in their own voices. To make them more authentic, Abel used simple language, devoid of sentimentality, even incorporating poor grammar and misspellings. It is up to the viewer to build a complete narrative. “The Last Word” will delight and intrigue everyone who sees it.

NOTE TO EDITORS: A selection of high-resolution, black and white images (the originals are black and white) are available on request from the library curator.

The San Diego Public Library’s Visual Arts Program is a nationally recognized series of exhibitions, lectures, a television program, and other art-related activities. The John Daniel Abel exhibition is the most recent of more than 125 museum-quality contemporary art exhibitions that have been organized by the Visual Arts Program of the San Diego Public Library since 1997. The mission of the Program is to demonstrate the Library’s role as a cultural institution embracing a broad range of disciplines, while assisting San Diego’s mid-career and older professional artists in achieving wider local, regional, and national attention. Visual Arts Program exhibitions are made possible, in part, by contributions from individuals, volunteer efforts, and the Friends of Central Library. For more information about the Visual Arts Program, the public can contact the library curator at (619) 238-6627 or visit the Library’s website at www.sandiegolibrary.org

Learn about other events at the San Diego Public Library’s Central Library and 35 branches, find links to numerous additional resources, or search for materials in the Library’s catalog online at www.sandiegolibrary.org

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