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Brutal Beauty @ San Diego Museum of Art

Hugo Crosthwaite's *Brutal Beauty* is a lesson in duality. From his two-toned graphite and charcoal drawings to his balance of pop art versus fine, his work is all about twos. There are even references to his bicoastal lifestyle. Now a New Yorker, Crosthwaite grew up in Baja California and is an alumnus of San Diego State University.

Take Crosthwaite's "The Tail for Two Cities," which was created specifically for the exhibition during a two-week span earlier this year. It's a caricature of the relationship between *lucha libre*-loving and gun-toting Tijuana and the comic-book-appreciating, palm tree-laden San Diego. With the backdrops of both cities prominent, Crosthwaite's wall-spanning work shows the contrast in the region's people and cultures and connects the two with a literal tail. With white space sprinkled throughout, deconstructing the piece, it seemingly speaks to the future yet to be told.

Throughout the exhibition, Crosthwaite's work proves haunting or political, cartoonish or literal, showing the depth of his ability and classical training. At times, it feels as if these are bad dreams made real, with surreal moments interspersed amongst more realistic ones. In "Twins," Crosthwaite explores the inherent censorship and loss of freedom following 9/11 by depicting a man's fist in the mouth of another in the foreground of the New York skyline.

In another piece, "Bartholomew," he shows the skin-flaying martyrdom of St. Bartholomew and the torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib. In comparing the two, he creates a macabre vision of a human slaughterhouse in Tijuana. This isn't the only religious reference, either, as the exhibition includes "St. Sebastian," a small, simple depiction of a suffering saint.

All told, *Brutal Beauty* is an arresting, larger-than-life expression of how Crosthwaite sits within two worlds. It is on display at the San Diego Museum of Art through July 16.

—Lorena Nava Ruggero