

GUERRERO: BEGUILING, BAFFLING

By KRISTINE MCKENNA

The idea dictates the medium for San Diego artist Raul Guerrero. As in work by Jonathan Borofsky, each of Guerrero's pieces is an independent satellite in its own weird orbit.

This free-wheeling approach makes for highly entertaining, if visually inconsistent, exhibitions where the viewer is sure to discover at least one piece that appeals to him because nothing resembles anything else.

A mini-retrospective of Guerrero, at USC Atelier in the Santa Monica Place mall (through Oct.

19), features work dating back to 1974, most of which is fairly baffling. Among the stuff on view: five silkscreen prints, each given the name of a different city; photographs; charts of Egyptian hieroglyphics spattered with black paint in the shape of a vortex; mixed-media sculptural assemblage; folk art painting, and a glass diorama encasing a large ceramic owl on a bed of brown sand littered with broken bottles.

Usually described as a conceptual artist, Guerrero explains his work as being "based on some of Carl Jung's ideas, and attempting to present a key to the viewer's

unconscious." Apparently Guerrero figures there's some swinging stuff going on in the collective unconscious because his work is brash, sexy and not above striking a cheap, glamorous pose.

His art is littered with the flotsam and jetsam of modern culture presented in the manner of precious archeological relics. These mystifying packets of information often take on the quality of evidence discovered at the scene of a crime, or private mementos whose significance is lost on everyone but the melancholy soul who cherishes them.

Clichéd ideas of romantic love are a recurring theme in Guerrero's work, as are art clichés—check his corny seascape or his sappy painting of chickens.

Exiting the gallery, one passes a straight black-and-white documentary-style photograph of two men at a table titled "They Gamble" and a pair of camera obscura prints of high school bands on parade.

Obviously, this show is so wide open to interpretation that you shouldn't have any trouble at all finding the key to your subconscious here.