

CHARLES DESMARAIS *Art*

Curators, the masses agree on Thiebaud

The venerable **Wayne Thiebaud** is one of those rare artists whose work resonates with a large general audience but who also commands the respect of curators and serious collectors. Best known for lushly painted portraits of luscious-looking baked goods, he has also convincingly captured the vertiginous thrills of the San Francisco streetscape and the sunny pleasures of the California delta landscape.

Thiebaud has also been very successful as a printmaker. Now 95, he has been working in the medium for more than 67 years. Christie's, the auction house, will survey that aspect of his career in a sale, "Thiebaud From Thiebaud: Works on Paper From the Private Studio of Wayne Thiebaud," on Sept. 29 in New York. San Francisco's Crown Point Press, where the artist has made many of his most

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Wayne Thiebaud's "City and Streets" (1995), drawn in pastel, charcoal and graphite.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

The people's — and curators' — choice

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important prints, will hold a short preview exhibition Tuesday-Thursday, Sept. 6-8.

I called Thiebaud at his studio in Sacramento and asked him whether appreciators and specialists look to his work for the same things. "I think there's a difference," he said. "I'm happy when people come and smile, and enjoy." But a sizable number of viewers "miss quite a bit."

"There's an important missing element (of) being able to make some sort of intimate association and access to the work. ... Painting is a kind of secret society, and there are initiation rites which have to be met, in order to know what's going on. ... Just checking what something like brush marks are about (for example), and how they function. The difference between a brush dance and a very fast brush that articulates something like tempo. So these wonderful parts of the reason why we paint, really, are often gone missing in people's experience."

The sale will support the Wayne Thiebaud Foundation, which will watch over Thiebaud's legacy and support the teaching collection of works by other artists he built over his career.

"We've tried to make it, also, a kind of educational exhibition," he said. "I've tried to get a survey of every kind of print I've ever made, which turns out to be about 16 different processes ... and I tried also to show how a single subject matter would change from, let's say, a cake drawing, and then a cake linocut, and then a silkscreen cake, and then a litho cake, and then a woodcut cake."

"Yes," he has said, "I can sin in any medium."

Ancient story, contemporary telling: How does a museum devoted to great cultures unfamiliar to most Americans and far from our shores interpret ancient epic tales for a contemporary audience? The Asian Art Museum had an idea to help create excitement about its exhibition "The Rama Epic: Hero, Heroine, Ally, Foe," opening Oct. 21: invite popular illustrators to team up to tell the classic story, then publish and distribute a zine.

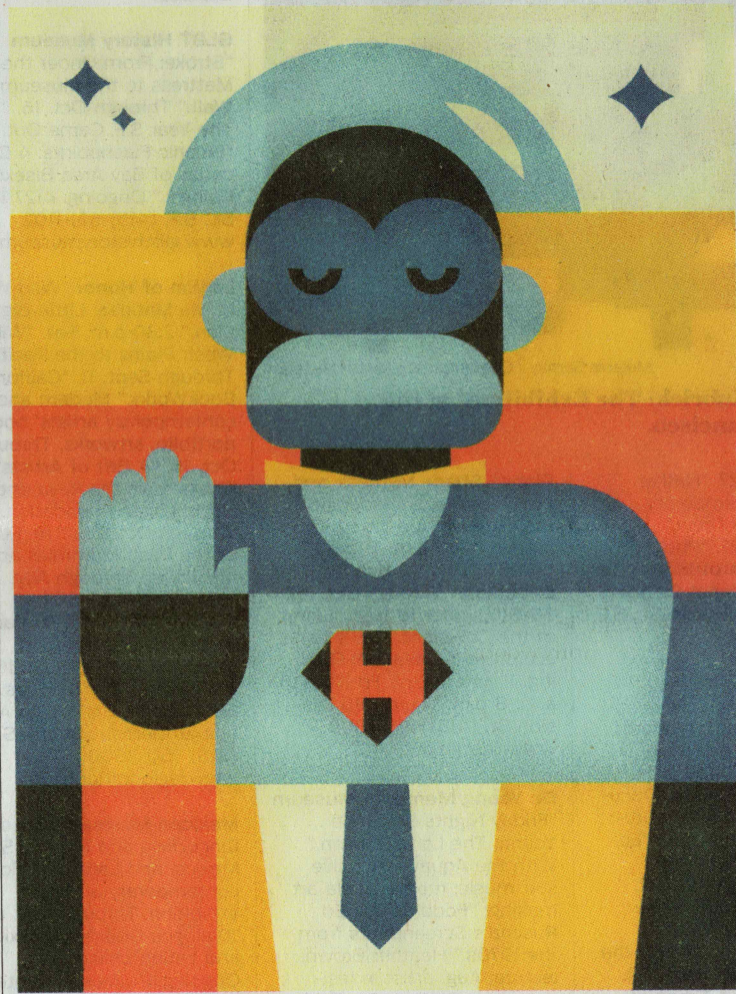
The Ramayana, depending on which expert you believe, dates from the 11th century, or the sixth, or — at the unlikely extreme — is 1.7 million years old. It tells the tale of Prince Rama, his lover Sita and the warrior monkey Hanuman in their battle against the demon king Ravana. For the project "Drawing Rama," the museum asked four artists to each tell a piece of the story.

Jon Adams has been a cartoonist for The Chronicle ("Friendship Town") and has created cartoon shorts for MTV, as well as other projects. **Wesley Allsbrook** is an illustrator who has published in the New Yorker, the New York Times, Wired and McSweeney's. **Sophia Foster-Dimino**



Asian Art Museum

Jon Adams was commissioned by the Asian Art Museum to draw "Ravana With demons" for the contemporary comics project.



Asian Art Museum

"I'm happy when people come and smile, and enjoy."

Wayne Thiebaud

is a former Google "doodler" and indie comics Ignatz Award winner who has done work for the New Yorker and Lucky Peach magazines. And **Andrea Nguyen**, a 2013 graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design, works at Airbnb as a graphic designer.

San Jose native **Sanaa Khan** helps run Tiny Splendor Press and Max's Garage Press, both

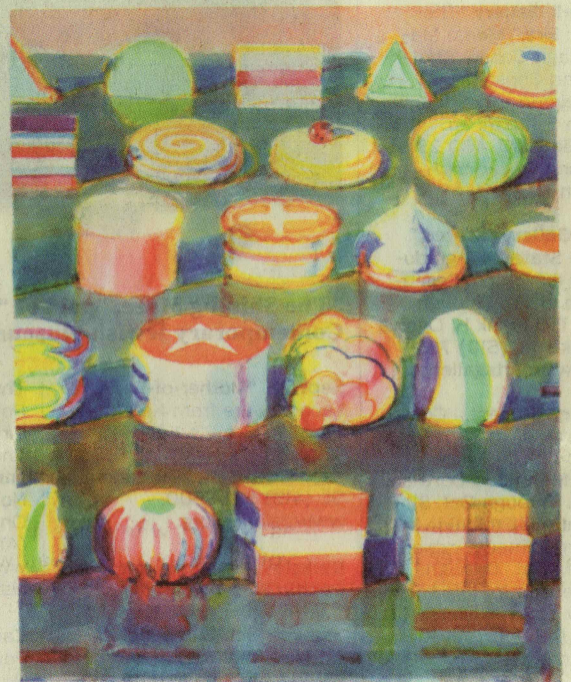
in Berkeley; she was commissioned to produce a cover that folds out to a poster.

The Rama Epic has been reinterpreted numerous times over the ages, and has been given the cartoon treatment often in recent decades. Nevertheless, "when we spoke with audiences, we found out that, while many people had heard of the Ramayana, they weren't familiar with the details," Asian Art Museum director **Jay Xu** said in a statement. "We felt like it was critical to demonstrate how this is a universal story that is relevant to artists and art lovers today and can inspire anyone

who lives in the Bay Area, no matter their heritage."

The museum will publish "Drawing Rama" in an edition of 1,000 copies; a prerelease event featuring the artists is planned for Saturday, Sept. 3, 5-6 p.m. at Mission: Comics & Art.

Last chance: As the end of summer makes way for a storm of early September openings, don't miss two important shows that stretch the limits of what we think of as photography, both closing Saturday, Sept. 3. At Gallery Wendi Norris, **Christine Elfmán** shows romantically ap-



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Left: Andrea Nguyen's "Hanuman as Five Movie Genres" at the Asian Art Museum. Above: Wayne Thiebaud's "Display Rows."

pealing images printed on paper she has sensitized with the juice of the amaranth flower, which gradually fades upon exposure to light, alongside more traditional — and more stable — silver gelatin prints ... And at Robert Koch Gallery, **Rachelle Bussi res** walks a tightrope between minimal depiction and the abstract sensual pleasures of cast shadows and photochemical tones.

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