

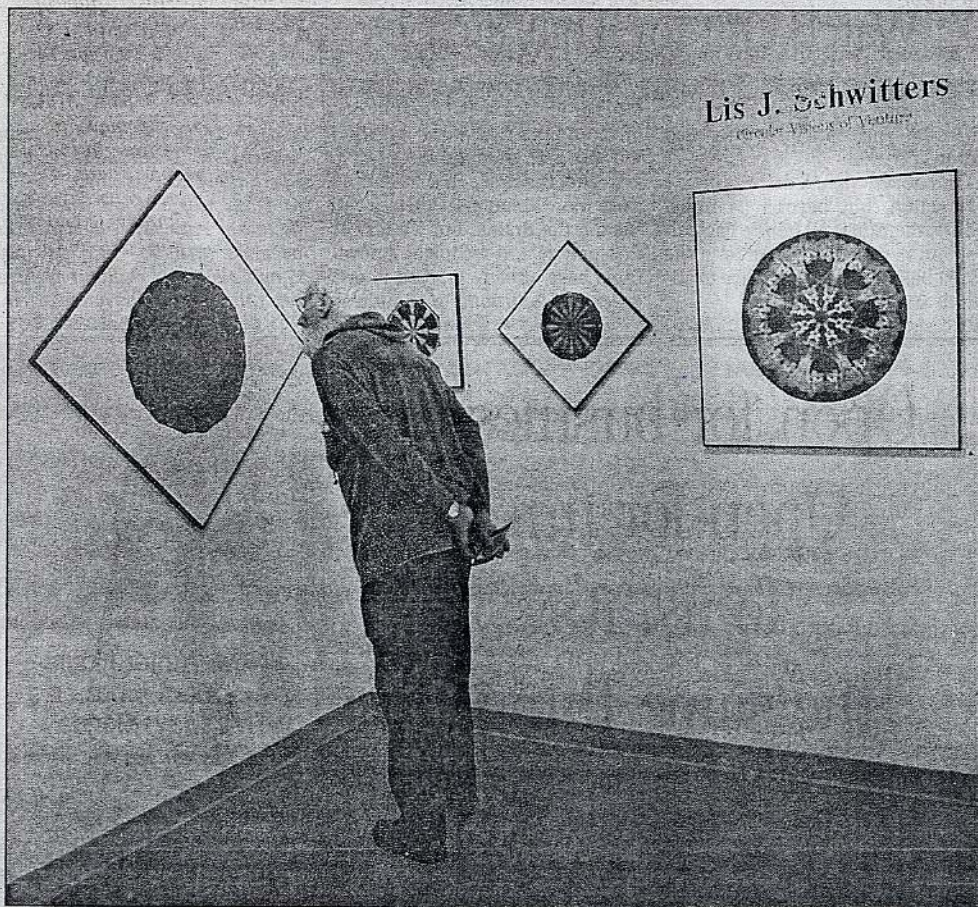
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Lis J. Schwitters
(Great Artist of Ventura)

SPENCER WEINER / Los Angeles Times

Sid Lyons, a visitor at Buenaventura Gallery in Ventura, examines a cyanotype image by Lis J. Schwitters.

Spinning Off Everyday Objects

Lis J. Schwitters' circular images, ranging from playful to mystical, find beauty in the banal.

Ventura County Culture

By JOSEF WOODARD
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

In the artwork of Lis J. Schwitters, the scenery may be vaguely familiar, but the context has changed radically. A photographer and printmaker with a fondness for extending her media, she likes to take banal, everyday source materials and turn them into what she calls "cyanotype mandalas."

These are kaleidoscopic hyper-images that spin off the meditative tradition of Tibetan mandalas, using the blueprint-like cyanotype process. This roughhewn, low-tech process supports the artist's intrigue with early forms of Modernism, from Russian Constructivism to early 20th century photographic

experiments. The works are full of visual echoes and a general sense of evoking both a suspension of reality and the creation of a new one.

Schwitters' work has been showing up around the county of late in various group shows, but seeing her current one-person show at Buenaventura Gallery, "Circular Visions of Ventura," is the best way to get familiar with her aesthetic mission.

Multiple hands appear as the source for "A Pledge of Allegiance," which then morphs into an image suggesting surreal and/or alien plant life. Sometimes, the transformations take bizarre turns, as with an image of orchids that, in its replicated form, suddenly looks bovine.

The work can dabble in optical trickery, as with "Demarcation Point," with road signs for the 101 and California Street, or "Inkblot Test #182," making the natural link

between her work and Rorschach test blots. Things go from word-playful, as in the scrambled Scrabble effect of "Party Platter," to mystical, as in "The White Radiance of Eternity."

With this work, Schwitters is gamely toying with different ideas, blending photographic reproduction and mixed-media reconstruction. In short, she renders basic, concrete images abstract and hypnotic, but within her own tightly controlled parameters. Reality is kept on a rubbery tether.

• Lis J. Schwitters, "Circular Visions of Ventura," Buenaventura Gallery, 700 E. Santa Clara St., Ventura. Ends Feb. 2. Gallery hours: Tuesdays to Saturdays, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. (805) 648-1235.