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Two wildly different shows are currently on display at the Augustana College Art Gallery in Rock Island: From a Borderless World: Works of Enrique Chagoya (through March 28) and John Beckelman: Recent Works in Clay (through March 20). I like John Beckelman's work, and I do not like Enrique Chagoya's. The contrast between the two artists is stark: Chagoya is literal and political, while John Beckelman is all about form, texture, and color.

Chagoya appears to have checked his brains at the door and adopted the New Left Politically Correct Stanford University position of the month. He might well be an assistant professor of painting, drawing, printmaking, and graduate seminar at Stanford in California, and he might be considered one of the most important artists of the past decade, but I think his work is trite. The arrangement of the show is outstanding, but the artwork does not excite me.

A representative example of Chagoya's work is a set of prints from The Return to Goya's Caprichos. The curator of this show has done an excellent job in matching a few of Goya's original prints to Chagoya's updated versions and then displaying them side-by-side. One of the sets matches Goya's intaglio print of robed, apparently biblical, figure appearing to peasants who recoil in fear. Chagoya's version shows a Ku Klux Klan member frightening some black people.

Chagoya immigrated to the United States in 1977 and stayed mostly in the western part of the country. It is unlikely he has personal experience with the Klan, so I assume that he is doing art based on experiences he has read about. Using second- and third-hand experiences creates literal art, and, in this case, trite content. Chagoya wants to be a hard-hitting political artist but succeeds only in illustrating political correctness. I'm not opposed to political art, but to be art it must be original, personal, and expressive. Chagoya's is not.

The work of John Beckelman, a professor of Art at Coe College in Cedar Rapids, is refreshingly different. Beckelman's work has as much political agenda as shapes and forms can have – not much. The work is art for art's sake, and it would be hard to point to a political cause that a four-foot covered jar supports.

Beckelman's three-dimensional pottery uses classic shapes and earthy colors. There is a comfort in these known quantities, and you are not jarred by crudely drawn images, as you

might be with Chagoya's work.

Both shows are worth seeing, for different reasons. Another good reason to stop by is that Beckelman has some very reasonable prices on his ceramics. If there were more works by Beckelman in the gallery, I would give the shows a stronger recommendation; as it is, I don't think they're worth driving miles to see.

Beckelman will conduct a public 45-minute guided tour of his pieces at 11:30 a.m. on Tuesday, March 20. The lecture will be complete with refreshments. The Augustana College Art Gallery is located in Centennial Hall, at the northwest corner of the intersection of 7th Avenue and 38th Street in Rock Island. The gallery's hours are noon to 4 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays.