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suehutchison
in my opinion

Will Clinton champion women's causes?

If one year ago you had asked Barbara O'Connor, director of the Institute for the Study of Politics and Media at California State University-Sacramento, whether Hillary Clinton had a good chance of being president of the United States, she would've said, "No way." Sherry Bebitch Jaffe, another well-known political analyst and professor at the University of Southern California, was only slightly more optimistic.

"A year ago, I thought she had maybe a 50-50 chance of even getting the Democratic nomination," Jaffe told me this month. "Now I look at her as the probable Democratic nominee and, if she is, the probable victor in November."

A pro-Clinton state

Of course, O'Connor and Jaffe acknowledged that they might have a very different appraisal in six months. But when a Field Poll was released last week showing that almost half of California Democrats likely to vote in the state primary plan to support Clinton, it didn't surprise either of them.

"This is a Hillary state, and what the Field Poll shows is rather unique to California," O'Connor said. "But it's clear that she's grown a lot as a candidate in the past months. She definitely does not look like a doe in the headlights."

The Hillary candidacy has not been marked by doe-like stereotypes of gentleness and softness. The "woman thing" isn't playing out quite the way we would have thought.

Despite the trappings of warm fuzziness in her campaign packaging — such as having her announce her candidacy online on a set that resembled a morning chat show — she has not come across as a Female Outsider along the lines of "Mrs. Smith Goes to Washington."

Instead, she is seen as the consummate insider, and that may hurt her chances with some women who want to see something different from business as usual.

Cathleen Deppe, who heads the Silicon Valley chapter of the working women's organization 9 to 5, said the jury is still out. Deppe said she is not at all sure whom she will vote for in the primary. (And 9 to 5 does not endorse candidates.)

"When you look at this through the gender lens and ask if, as president, Hillary would be a good friend to women, it's not clear," Deppe told me. "Health care is extremely important, and she's been very vague about it so far. She's keeping to the middle of the road."

Not all women in favor

The bloc of single women with a household income under \$30,000 a year — the women who don't vote but could turn the tide of an election if they did — also is by no means guaranteed to go for Clinton. "This is not a group that's been lining up for Hillary in the past," said Chris Desser, San Francisco-based co-director of Women's Voices Women Vote, a non-partisan organization dedicated to increasing the participation of this bloc of women. "They gravitate to issues of poverty, health care, equal pay for equal work. So far, Obama and Edwards have had more clear messages about those things."

Still, polls show Clinton is doing well among women in general, and O'Connor has a theory about that. "I think, secretly, a lot of women really do want to see a woman as president. But they also want a winner. And that's it. Can she win?"

In the coming months, the question among Clinton's potential supporters may be: "Is she woman enough to fight hard for so-called women's issues?"

Or will she have a better chance of victory if she blurs the focus of the gender lens?

Read Sue Hutchison's blog at <http://blogs.mercurynews.com/hutch>.

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■ "Kala," the sophomore CD by M.I.A., left. Page 3E
■ The latest DVD chapters of "Trapped in the Closet" by R. Kelly. Page 6E

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Weaving warfare

QUILTS MUSEUM PRESENTS UNUSUAL LOOK AT WORLD AT WAR

By Sara Wykes | Special to the Mercury News

For thousands of years, women have woven rugs, incorporating into each some element of identity — a color or pattern that would mark that rug as surely as a "Made in" label does.

Flowers, animals — real and mythological — intricate geometric patterns, all combined in a dazzling tour de handicraft force that ultimately won the rugs the attention of collectors.

But the last 40 years have seen those traditional patterns and images give way to a new language born of a

new reality: mechanized war. How odd to see machine guns enclosing a grouping of attack helicopters. How sad to see falling bombs appear in the thousands and thousands of fibers that still have the firm, rich sturdiness of a classic rug.

The San Jose Museum of Quilts & Textiles is host to two exhibits of work by women who are witnesses to war in the Middle East, Asia and Africa. Another exhibit tracks the expression of patriotism, pure and cynical, through more than 200 years of American history.

Despite their unusual content, Afghan war rugs still have elements that reflect age-old traditions. This rug's background is a crimson red with fluctuations in the dye and simple borders that identify it as made by a Turkmen woman. The Turkmen once shared a common language, but now live in several tribal groups across Iran, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan.

AK-47s take a central position in this rug's design. The weaver has incorporated Cyrillic (Russian) lettering on the weapons.

Looking almost like dragonflies, these Tu-16s are high-speed, twin-engine jet bombers used by the Soviet Union that travel across the rug's landscape. Nicknamed "Badger," each could carry thousand of pounds of cruise missiles or conventional bombs.

Two kinds of helicopters were heavily used during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The rug-maker's miniaturized Mi-8 and Mi-24 attack helicopters don't express the power of the twin-turbines — or the helicopters' adaptability as a transport aircraft and gunship.



Armored personnel carriers round out the rug's set of vehicles and aircraft, making it a cynical catalog of war machines.

Grenades are found in varying sizes, but are identifiable as the roundish, yellowish objects covered with a black grid. Out of the top you can see the handle/pin. The F-1 grenade was nicknamed "limonka" or lemon. It is a fragmentation grenade meant to be used against people, not buildings or tanks.

These rocket-propelled grenade launchers (RPG-7s) are still in use — in Iran.

A generic automatic pistol, possibly a Makarov. Some of the exhibit's war rugs were commissioned by Russian soldiers, others were made in protest. The skill is evident in all, as is the underlying message that the women who made them live in a world far different from the time when such rugs were filled with images of things that couldn't hurt anyone.

Three exhibitions exploring themes of war, patriotism and politics

Where: San Jose Museum of Quilts & Textiles, 520 S. First St., San Jose.

When: Through Sept. 23. The museum is open 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday.

Tickets: \$5-\$6.50. Admission is free on the first Friday of each month.

Information: (408) 971-0323 or www.sjqmilmuseum.org.

COURTESY OF SAN JOSE MUSEUM OF QUILTS & TEXTILES

'Playboy' sweeps into town

BLACK COMEDY TAKES STAGE AT SHAKESPEARE SANTA CRUZ

By Karen D'Souza
Mercury News

"The Playboy of the Western World" set off riots in the streets of Dublin at its debut a hundred years ago.

J.M. Synge's portrait of Irish villagers as small-minded, loudmouthed blackguards denouncing each other all the way to the gallows seemed like a stain on the reputation of the Irish people in 1907. The Irish nationalists were offended by its "immorality."

Nowadays, however, different echoes can be heard in Synge's pitch-black comedy of the unmannered. The playwright may have set his satirical masterpiece in a remote patch of rain-soaked County Clare, but he was clearly writing about the foibles of human nature in general, not just that of isolated Irish peasant folk.



STEVE DIBARTOLOMEO

From left, Elise Youssef, Cody Nickell and Ferin Petrelli on stage in Santa Cruz.

Synge's love for the Aran Islands, their folklore and traditions also comes through loud and clear in every well-turned bit of rustic patois, every wry exchange of banter and the irresistible blarney that pops off the stage in the

theater review

rambunctious revival by Shakespeare Santa Cruz.

Directed by Robert Moss, this "The Playboy of the Western World" charms the audience from start to finish, making us wonder why the bittersweet comedy is so seldom staged these days. Despite its keen influence on contemporary playwrights (notably, the tragicomic oeuvre of Martin McDonagh), "Playboy" remains largely undiscovered by local theaters. Sigh. This enormously entertaining staging may well change all that.

Perhaps because of its mastery of Shakespearean verse, this ensemble has the chops to play Synge's language like the symphony of rural idioms it is. Brimming with bluster and lit with patches of poetry, Synge's text demands

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