

April 4, 2005

Sesnon Gallery features innovative exhibit by new art faculty

By [Scott Rappaport](#)

**Dee Hibbert-Jones** was recently hired as an assistant professor to develop the public art program at UCSC. Her current research explores the relationships between art, commerce, and mental health in a project she calls “Psychological Prosthetics.” In collaboration with mental health workers, she has created (and patented) a brand of sculptural products designed to aid mental health disorders. The products employ sleek, high-tech designs with gadgetry attached such as LCD monitors, push-buttons and telescoping sections for portability.



Hibbert-Jones’s creations include a *Separation Anxiety Disorder Teddy Backpack* and an *Attention Deficit Disorder Brace*. She has also constructed a *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Security Vest*—complete with an LCD screen to cathartically retell a personal trauma story, a stress gauge connected to body temperature, and a walkie-talkie check-in device to monitor personal safety.

“Sculpture is an emotion made tangible,” Hibbert-Jones explained. “I’m exploring the role of the artist as healer by creating a tangible product to soothe a mental health disorder. If someone is having an anxiety attack, I can give them something to hold or wear like a security blanket. I look at ideas like: ‘How do you create an environment that creates an emotional response of safety?’ or ‘What kinds of things help?’”

Hibbert-Jones said she conceived her project while reflecting on the massive influence of the psycho-pharmaceutical industry. The presentation of her products mimics a corporate display, using the language of the pharmaceutical industry in text, logo, colors, and signage. “I’m turning the Sesnon Gallery into a trade show of psychological prosthetics,” said Hibbert-Jones. “I’ll have an infomercial about the products on display, banners advertising the products, and photos on the walls of people wearing and using the products.”

Like political theater, Hibbert-Jones’s work is both serious and satirical, with the intent of stimulating discussion of important issues related to mental illness, diagnosis, prescription, and treatment. The Sesnon installation will also include an interactive performance art aspect—outside the gallery, performers in lab coats will interview people about depression and anxiety to kick-start conversations about mental health.

Hibbert-Jones said that she will take the project on tour later this year to museums and galleries throughout the United States. She also noted that a portable “Psychological Prosthetics Trauma Unit” will tour Europe in 2006.

*An opening reception will be held on Wednesday, April 6, from 5 to 7 p.m. Sesnon Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday from noon to 5 p.m. A lecture series with a talk will take place at Porter College Faculty Gallery: April 12th*