

The Mercury News

MercuryNews.com

Los Altos art exhibit ties into Valentine's Day

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Article Launched: 02/13/2008 11:33:19 AM PST

A digitally painted red heart pops out of a lime-colored, opened gift box, with overflowing gold and silver ribbons. The label beneath the painting reads, "Love Is a Gift."

In another painting, titled "Fall in Love," a tiny mermaid with an emerald tail dives into a blooming giant red rose.

These art works share the theme "From the Heart," which characterizes the Fine Arts League of Cupertino member show and sale in honor of Valentine's Day. The exhibition is being held through the month of February at The Main Street Cafe, 134 Main St. in Los Altos.

Founded by a group of local artists in 1963, FALC promotes the practice and appreciation of the visual arts and helps its members improve their skills and exhibit their works. Its members come Cupertino, Sunnyvale, Los Altos, San Jose and other local communities.

Belinda Lima, one of the FALC vice presidents, proposed the title "From the Heart" when the FALC board scheduled the show for February.

"It's a title that would tie the show in with Valentine's Day but open enough for everyone to interpret it differently," says Lima.

The show displays 40 paintings in oil, watercolor, pastel, acrylic, gouache, photography and mixed

media, created by 26 artists. The artists each interpreted the Valentine's theme in their own way.

There are no people in "The Dance" by Jean Black.

"Look at the curves and you can see the movement of dance," says Black of her abstract painting. "The red waves show the girl's heart pumping for the handsome guy she's dancing with."

Laurie Creveling presents strong strokes of smearing colors in "See My Heart."

"The heart is hidden behind a lot of conflicting emotions represented by dramatic colors," she says.

Black, Creveling, and Lima all like using acrylic.

"I prefer the texture of acrylic," says Lima. "It shows brush strokes and layers. To me it's more expressive."

"I work with oil for all the glazing," says Iona Ezaki, president of FALC. "It renders dark colors darker and light colors brighter. It takes much longer to dry than acrylic or watercolors, but that makes it forgiving. You can paint over it while it's drying."

Janki Chokshi, the creator of "Fall in Love," combines sand with oil. She collects sand from beaches, glues patterns of sand on a wooden board, and paints over the sand-filled images with oil.

"The sand gives a three-dimension effect," says Chokshi, pointing at the rose that is on a slight rise from the background of painting.

"I think oil is a good medium for landscape," says Joy Kuo about her two landscape oil paintings.

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To Kuo, a cancer survivor, the lighthouse in one of her displayed works is a symbol of hope.

"Landscape represents love for nature, which matches our theme of love," says Nina Uppaluru, vice president of FALC, about her watercolor painting of Yosemite rocks.

"Watercolor is an amazingly versatile medium," adds Uppaluru. "When you put it on paper, it naturally spreads as if it had a mind of its own."

Rajiv Khilnani is another fan of water-based media. Incorporating his fascination with geometric forms into the exhibition, he uses heart shapes of different sizes to symbolize love in different age groups.

Arthur Kao presents recurrent subjects of Chinese paintings in his two watercolor works for the show. To him, February brings not only Valentine's Day but also Chinese New Year's.

The mother gold fish and her two little ones in one of his paintings are auspicious. As in Chinese the word fish shares the same pronunciation as the word surplus, the gold fish signifies carrying the surplus of wealth into the new year.

Kao's other painting has many lines going in different directions around a Chinese character, fu, which means "fortune." Kao says the abstract picture is a winter scene that awaits a new year to come with good fortune.

Yao-Pi Hsu's "Profound Memory" looks like an abstract painting, but it's actually a combination of seven photographs. The base layer is an image of water ripples and their reflection of tree branches. Hsu layered six images of roses on top of it.

"The water reflection serves as a web of memories,"

says Hsu. "Each rose represents a different experience to be remembered. I used Adobe Photoshop to mix the seven pictures into one."

Carrie Zeidman, the artist of "Love Is a Gift," uses computer software to paint and print her works.

"I like the amount of control I get with digital," she says.

Despite the availability of high technology tools, Joanne Kim prefers using an ink pen to draw.

"Black and white has a calming effect," says Kim. "It brings out the peace and quiet in my heart."

"This exhibition is eclectic," says customer Lila Schmidt.

Stan Morest, another customer, says he no longer lives in Los Altos but still comes to Main Street Cafe mainly for the art on the walls.

In cooperation with the nonprofit Los Altos Cultural Association, Main Street Cafe hosts a different art exhibition every month.

FALC hopes more cafes will do the same. The group is actively seeking more venues for member shows.

FALC meets the second Monday of each month from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Quinlan Community Center, 10185 N. Stelling Road, in Cupertino, where it regularly displays its members' works. Prominent artists from all over the Bay Area demonstrate their techniques at the monthly meetings, which are open to the public.

For more information about FALC, visit www.falc.org.

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