

# Arts & Entertainment

A weekly guide to music, theater, art, culture, books and more, edited by Karla Kane

## Pacific Art League goes 'Beyond 2020' with new exhibition

Venerable Palo Alto arts organization celebrates its 99th anniversary despite pandemic restrictions

by Sheryl Nonnenberg

For most nonprofit visual arts organizations, staying afloat is challenging even in the best of times. A pandemic presents even more difficulties, as venues remain closed and interaction is limited. The Pacific Art League (PAL) has decided to brave the storm and hold its annual anniversary exhibition while finding innovative ways to work around COVID-19 restrictions. The result is "Beyond 2020," a juried competition encompassing work in a variety of media that can be viewed, until Dec. 31, on the organization's website and in the League's windows in downtown Palo Alto.

This year marks 99 years that PAL has been in existence. Anniversary committee chair Kay Culpepper described the process that led to the decision to hold the show.

"As the virus wore on, it became apparent that we needed this exhibition more than ever before. Now came the task of 'How to do it in the midst of a pandemic?' Our amazing committee made up of members, artists, instructors, board members and staff all working together made it feel possible."

As with previous competitions, staff got the prospectus circulated via call-to-artists listings and notifications to other arts organizations. Culpepper said that word of mouth was also a powerful

communication tool. The exhibition was open to Bay Area artists who could hand-deliver their work if they wished to compete for space at the onsite gallery. Artists also had the option to submit JPEG files. Artists had to pay a submission fee, as the event is a fundraiser for the organization, but Culpepper believes that this year's show offered even more benefits than usual.

"We had two amazing jurors, 10 prize awards, three full months of viewing time, offers of submission sponsors and 60% of sales going directly to the artists. In addition, the artist behind this year's Best of Show (Katherine Filice for her ink on paper "Memory April") will have a monthlong solo show in the main gallery once the building reopens."

The jurors selected for this year's competition have years of experience as artists, instructors and curators. Ric Ambrose works in large-scale drawings and has curated numerous museum exhibitions. Chun-Hui Yu is a painter and has taught Chinese brush painting and calligraphy at San Jose City College and at PAL. Both said that they were impressed with the high quality of submissions. Ambrose explained that the goal was to accept 100 works of art, which was roughly half of the total number submitted. Ambrose and Yu separately selected works then met,

via Zoom calls, to compare their choices. They continued to cull the list until reaching the desired number. Award winners were reviewed in person and announced at a virtual opening that took place on Oct. 2.

Yu shared her criteria for selecting art.

"The first part is objective and includes technique, composition, color and light. The second part is subjective: creativity, imagination, emotion and feelings."

She added that she feels that competitions like this are important, "to promote art and artists, encourage artists to create and inspire and support the community through these times."

A scroll through the online gallery reveals that the show has something for everyone. Enjoy the sunny landscapes of Early California art? Check out David Stonesifer's bucolic "Saratoga History Orchard" or the rolling hills in Jack Culpepper's "Golden State." The cool stillness of Edward Hopper is mirrored in Mara Catherine Sippel's painting "Lights Out." And if the chiaroscuro contrasts found in the photography of Edward Weston intrigue you, Marj Green's "Seeing the World Through Curtains" is sure to please. Joan Hancock's "Safe" is a portrait of a woman against a patterned background, reminiscent of Henri Matisse.

The intricate work of Dutch Masters is reflected in Nicole Golko's stunning still-life "Oranges and Poppies." And if abstraction is more your thing, Ken Brenner's "Cascade" is a splash of complementary colors with a push/pull motif, similar to the work of Hans Hoffman. For those of us who cannot afford blue-chip prices, exhibitions like this offer a way to acquire affordable art as well as to support local artists and venerable teaching organizations like PAL.

There is also an opportunity to see some of the art in person, even though PAL remains closed. Throughout the course of the exhibition, art will be installed on wall panels inside the perimeter windows. Currently, the display includes the award winners but,



"Croquet" by Dana Shields.

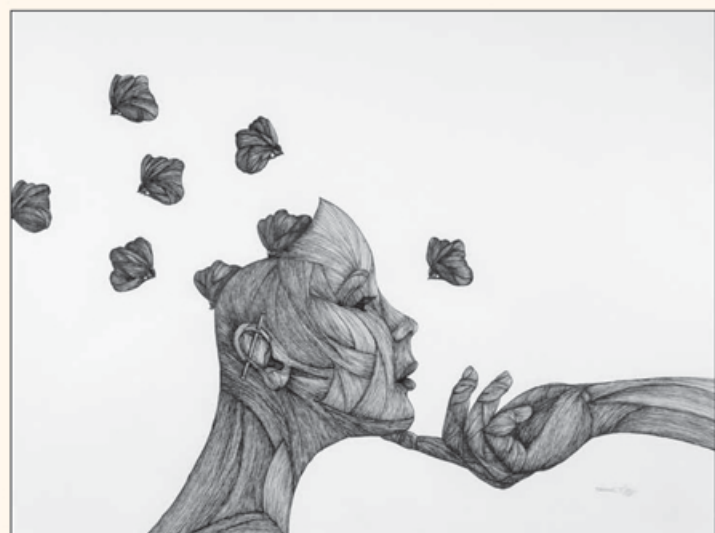
in future, the displays will change every two weeks so that all of the selected pieces can be seen. It is a clever way to work around the shuttered building and enlivens the neighborhood, as the windows are illuminated at night. As Culpepper noted, "We had to find a way to think outside the box and outside the building."

Having surmounted the obstacles presented by the pandemic this year, PAL can look ahead to next year and their centennial commemoration. Culpepper expressed optimism for the future, based on how "Beyond

2020" came together. "For the Art League itself the greatest reward is having art again online and outside, lighting up our windows on the world. But we hope our gift to the community is rewarding as well — beautiful art for the public to view, enjoy and celebrate."

The Pacific Art League is located at 668 Ramona St., Palo Alto. For more information and to view the online exhibition, go to [pacificartleague.org](http://pacificartleague.org).

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"Memory April" by Katherine Filice.



"Saratoga History Orchard" by David Stonesifer.