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 - Marian Nichols, Moraga

**Artist's Saint Mary's Show 'A Real Honor'**

By Chris Lavin



Paul Kratter

Photo Chris Lavin

Paul Kratter is fast. He walks fast. He talks fast. He answers questions fast.

He even paints fast. He sets up his whole portable studio from a backpack in under two minutes.

"You have a finite amount of time to paint. The scene changes quickly," the Moraga resident said of his plein air (done in the open air) work. "I would rather do four or five paintings in a day than paint a bigger piece and go back to the same spot two or three times to paint it."

Ironically, what Kratter creates in a couple of hours looks as if it took weeks. Now his talent has been rewarded this summer with a two-artist show at Saint Mary's College Museum of Art. The show opened June 1 and will be open from 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Wednesdays through Sundays through Sept. 22. Martinez plein air artist Mary Lou Correia's work is also included.

Kratter, 57, has been an artist ever since he was a child. He can't remember a time when he didn't draw. He looked forward to finding Sports Illustrated and National Geographic magazines in the mail.

"I'd copy the covers," he said. His prowess landed him in commercial advertising as an adult, illustrating

things like the program covers for the San Francisco 49ers. In 2004 he published what turned out to be an award-winning children's book, "The Living Rain Forest: An Animal Alphabet," with Scholastic. It was a far cry from his plein air paintings: It took him seven years to finish it.

Then Kratter had his eureka moment. He attended a plein air event in Sonoma, and that was it.

"I fell in love," Kratter said — pointing out not with his wife, Tia, an art director at Pixar, with whom he raised two sons. "That had already happened. I just fell in love. I went out and bought paints the next day."

A stroll around Kratter's home studio, which is immaculate ("that's my wife"), shows familiar sights: the pear orchard in bloom at Canyon Road and Camino Pablo in Moraga, Half Dome in Yosemite, Mount Diablo. His favorite places to paint include Point Lobos, and the rural parts of Sonoma and Petaluma. Cityscapes don't interest him. Bams do.

And animals. He has painted cows. Moose. Birds. Many of his paintings feature a lonely road. "Anything that leads your eye into the painting," Kratter said. "You're telling a story. You want to feel the weather. When you paint in

Yosemite when your feet are cold, you paint faster."

Sometimes he comes up with the titles for his paintings as he's doing them. A flock of red-winged blackbirds in Livermore led to "Serenaded." A spectacular early morning view in the Eastern Sierras — Kratter's annual trip with some other artists, which is the highlight of his year — is titled "The View with Coffee." It may have been called "The View with Jethro Tull," Kratter's default musician on his headphones.

Once he has unpacked his easel and paints from his REI backpack, Kratter assesses what he's looking at. He asks himself, "What's important here? This is it! It's like I have an animated ticking clock, and it's decision time. What's important? What do I edit out? That's just as important as what you put in. I paint well under pressure."

Kratter reached down to wrestle his shoe lace away from Zippy, his ever-chewing Corgi. Then he said, "Oh!" and rushed to get his paints. Staff from Saint Mary's College were on their way to pick up the paintings for his show. "I forgot to sign this one."

Kratter's work may be seen at his website, www.PaulKratter.com.

**For the Love of Learning:**

**Campolindo Wins National Academic Decathlon Competition**

By Sophie Braccini



From left: Council member Phil Arth with Campolindo's winning team members, Brian Lederman, Vikram Bhadvi, Christoph Steefel, Zach Scherer, Evelyn Steffel, Mayor Dave Trotter, Laura Gustafson, Tristan Caso, Marina Han, Graham Wade, Coach Paul Verbansky and Council member Ken Chew (Council member Michael Metcalf behind Graham Wade).

Photo Andy Scheck

Talk about bragging rights! For the first time, a Northern California high school won the United States Academic Decathlon Competition, and this amazing victory was snatched with panache by no other than the Campolindo High School team. The Moraga Town Council declared May 22 "Campolindo High School Academic Decathlon Team Day" in the town of Moraga.

"We were very happy and proud to get this proclamation," commented Laura Gustafson (co-captain with Evelyn Steffel) after the ceremony. The Academic Decathlon is a club activity at Campolindo. The students meet after class during the year, and also during weekends as

the competition nears. There are about 20 students in the club, and nine are part of the competing team.

Interestingly, the nine competitors cannot all be straight-A students. "Three of them are in the honors group with an un-weighted GPA of 3.75 and higher, three have a GPA of 3.0 or higher, and three have a GPA below 3.0," explained Gustafson.

"Those who do [the decathlon], do it for the love of learning," she said. "I've been with the club since my freshman year and have learned a lot about a lot of subjects that sometimes weren't even studied in class." The 10 Academic Decathlon subjects are art, economics, essay, interview, language and literature, mathematics, music, science, social studies and speech, which all re-

involved around this year's theme: Russia.

Gustafson appreciates how the competition goes beyond the simple memorization of facts. "We go into a lot of depth on each subject," she said. "We have to do comparative and analytical studies, write essays and make oral presentations." She believes that all the training she received helped her with the college application process.

Anyone can join the club, which involves students from grades 9-12 and is supported by teacher Paul Verbansky. The Campolindo Academic Decathlon team that represented the State of California in the medium-sized school division at Nationals also collected 31 individual medals in all subjects.