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Bursting Negative Myths About Aging

By Sophie Braccini



Anna Marie Lininger's colorful eggs are on display at Art at 80. Photos Sophie Braccini

There is no retirement of the passions. The new exhibit put on by the Lamorinda Arts Council, Art At 80, says just that: art is as much a companion for life as it is an expression of the self.

The 36 octogenarian artists displayed at the Orinda Library now until the end of the month offer a wide panorama of different media; some of the artists are very well known and others less familiar. It's a very vibrant exhibit of local talents where many pieces are for sale.

Lamorinda Arts Council's Elana O'Loskey proposed a couple of years ago this idea because she had been so inspired by local aging art teachers.

"They are very inspiring, they balance passion and personal life and have great sense of humor," she said.

Cocurators Maggie Boscoe and Natalie Wheeler, along with committee member Bill Carmel, put in months of work to organize this exhibit. "Their purpose is to show the community what it looks like to be 80 years or older living the life of a creative person - vital, engaged, inspiring," says O'Loskey.

The organizers were thrilled that 90-year-old hometown, world-class celebrity sculptor Joe Cleary agreed to be in the show with three beautiful female bronze figures.

Cleary has lived off his art all his life, both excelling at commercial and fine art. A painter and sculptor, Cleary was a very successful mid-20th century illustrator doing work for the Saturday Evening Post. One of his sculptures, the monumental Mother River Memorial, was commissioned in 2001. It stands on the Mississippi riverfront in downtown New Orleans and miraculously survived the ravages of Hurricane Katrina. A Bay Area native, Cleary traveled the world and came back to teach at his alma mater, the California College of the Arts. The three bronzes by Cleary on display at the exhibit are Lady in The Pond, The Summer Wind and Dancer at Rest.

Anna Marie Lininger heard from a friend about the proposed exhibit and thought that at 88 she qualified. The Lafayette resident creates beautiful batik goose eggs. Some of Lininger's most fascinating series are tessellations. The repetition of the geometric shapes, changing in size to accommodate the eggs' rotundity, is visually intoxicating. Of course age has to be taken into account as Lininger used to work with her eyes, then had to add glasses and now uses a jeweler magnifier on top of her glasses. But the long and multiple layered process continues to bring her joy and peace.

Betty Rothaus, an art instructor at The Reutlinger, an assisted living center in Danville, submitted work from seven of her students, some of them in wheelchairs. Two of them had done painting before, others started to paint when they came to her class. Time after time Rothaus has witnessed the therapeutic aspect of artistic expression, how older people's roles change from being a burden to a leader and teacher.

"Their self-image, their self-esteem changes," she says. "They focus on beauty and the artistic process, they acquire skills and carry it forward. Their conversation changes, they become creators and are excited by the process." The teacher adds that older people have less self-criticism and are not afraid to take risks.

"Everyone has a creative being inside and it is not true that it disappears as you get older," she says. "It is with you all through your life."

Rothaus and her students will attend an artists' reception from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. on Sunday, July 17. The public is invited.



A painting by Shirley Case.



A painting by Katarina Kivel.

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