

Artists push artistic boundaries in new Moraga Art Gallery show

By Sophie Braccini



Ancestral Mountain by Linda Yoshizawa.

Photo provided

Moraga Art Gallery visitors are invited to embark on an exploratory visual journey as part of this summer's *Experiments and Explorations* exhibit, which features Patrick Hayashi's inventive, beautifully innovative and evocative imagery, and Linda Yoshizawa's weaves of textures, layers and threads that memorialize her Japanese ancestry. These artists' work, along with the ceramics of Lauri-Moffet Fehlberg and Kurt Fehlberg, will be on display through Aug. 12 at the gallery in the Rheem Valley Shopping Center.

Hayashi, a former UC Berkeley vice-president, decided in retire-

ment that it was time to do all the things that he always wanted to do: namely, explore his artistic side, or, as he says, use the other side of his brain. He started taking voice lessons, and, more to the point of this article, painting.

Describing his artistic journey as a spiritual pursuit, Hayashi says the process of creation takes him to a different mental and spiritual place where the world stands still. He immerses himself in the processes, but he is not pinned to any specific media or technique. Art is an exploration for Hayashi.

One technique Hayashi uses is encaustic painting, which involves

melting pigmented beeswax and painting it with a brush on a rigid panel where it hardens immediately. The artist then uses a torch to melt and move the wax around, literally painting with the torch. A series of florals against a black backdrop are featured at the gallery. Hayashi pushed the technique by adding Japanese Sumi ink that he hits with the torch. But the ink can catch fire. He moves the fire around, which he says is impossible to control. Thus he calls the process "Zencaustic," because the process of experimentation is pushed until something emerges, but if one tries to control it, nothing

happens – just like in life.

The artist invented another process called smoke painting, which is something so unique and interesting that a friend at the State Department invited Hayashi to go to Kyrgyzstan to teach a master class on how to paint with smoke. Hayashi discovered the process by chance while trying to burn a disappointing creation in his kitchen. He now uses fire and smoke to create portraits, landscapes and abstract work. In the gallery, visitors can view folders that explain how the artist works.

Hayashi knows fellow artist Yoshizawa well, describing her as a perfectionist as well as an exploratory artist, pushing the boundary of her art.

Art has always been part of Yoshizawa's life. She graduated in fine arts, and got a job as a technical illustrator, while at night she continued to develop her artistic expression through serigraphy, or silkscreen printing work. After an interruption to raise her children and work as an art instructor in their San Ramon school, she went back to her printing practice at Sherry Smith Bell's Lafayette studio. Yoshizawa was one of the founding artists of the Lafayette gallery that operated for 15 years on Lafayette Circle. She now works in her own studio with her own press. She explains that her latest work, now on view at the Moraga gallery, is the visual rendition of the exploration

of her Japanese ancestry.

Her mother grew up in Japan and lived in Hiroshima. She was a teenager during World War II and was lucky to survive the atomic bombing. Her father, a third-generation American of Japanese descent, was studying in Japan when the war broke out and could not come back until after the war. Yoshizawa says it is difficult for her parents to talk about their past. She gets pieces of information from them, peeling layer after layer to get to the truth of their experience. To transcribe this on canvas she uses collographs, a technique involving a collage of layers of different materials glued onto a printing plate made of cardboard. The artist varnishes the surface before painting it with acrylic. Yoshizawa then prints her creation on the surface of her choice.

The gallery is featuring one of her triptychs, called "Ancestral Mountain." It represents the strata of Yoshizawa's ancestral history. Using strings to tie elements together like veins and currents that come from the deepest layers to the surface, Yoshizawa says it represents our ties to our past. These powerful ideas guiding the artist's creation form a visually appealing work, abstract but also timeless.

The Moraga Art Gallery, located at 522 Center St. in Moraga, is open from noon to 5 p.m. from Wednesday to Sunday.

Author sensitively chronicles the horrors of war and its aftermath

By Sora O'Doherty



Rachel Hall Photo provided

When you are forced to flee by the horrors of war, what must you leave behind? What can't you leave behind? These questions, addressed so lyrically and sensitively by Rachel Hall in her new collection of stories, "Heirlooms," are as relevant to the refugees of today as they were to her own family, who fled from France during World War II.

Hall's family escaped from France late in the war. Her grandmother was Jewish, her grandfather was not, but in a land filled with occupiers and collaborators, they were not safe and so her grandfather called upon a friend who had made a success of himself in America to sponsor her grandparents and her mother. They were rescued and started a new life in America. It wasn't easy in any way. Like many refugees, they had very little. Farmers in France, they had to start from scratch in America. But the little family of three did succeed, and their granddaughter has chosen to tell their story in language she purposely made clear and beautiful to contrast with the horror of the time of which she writes.

Hall's real grandmother, whom she never knew, died when her mother was very young. Her Jewish grandfather was in the French Resistance, so the little girl was adopted by his twin sister and her Catholic husband, a farmer from a small village. But the family was not safe, and had to move about France to escape being turned in by eager French collaborators. The role of French collaboration has not been widely acknowledged in France until quite recently, Hall says. Now, according to Hall, more literature and films are coming out to cast a light on this unlovely aspect of French history.

Hall's real grandfather was killed at Saint-Genis-Laval, now the Caveau des Martyrs (Tomb of the Martyrs). On Aug. 20, 1944, a few days before the liberation of Lyon, the Germans took 120 prisoners from Montluc and murdered them at the Fort de Côte Lorette, which they burned once the massacre was finished. Some 10 Frenchmen gave them a hand. An immense tomb holds the ashes of the victims. (www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr/en/footsteps-resistance-lyon) Each year this is now commemorated by the Ceremony of Aug. 20. Hall recounts this historic episode in the heartrending story, "Generations."

In "White Lies" Hall writes of her adoptive grandfather's dilemma: should he tell his mother-in-law in Israel that her son was murdered, a heartbreak she might not have been able to bear? Instead, for many years he created fictitious letters from her son, telling his mother all about his new life in America. Hall writes of this with tenderness and love, thinking of

her grandfather as her predecessor in the art of fiction. Was it kindness to so deceive his mother-in-law, or a horrible lie? Hall leaves it to her readers to decide, but acknowledges that her grandfather's intent was to protect his mother-in-law. This is perhaps even more remarkable when you consider that her grandfather, unlike her grandmother, was not Jewish, yet he put himself into the imagined shoes of his Jewish brother-in-law and created a life of fiction for him as a successful and busy doctor in America. Perhaps this is where Hall got the idea that in fiction one can create what should have happened.

Hall examines a variety of motives throughout the stories. Perhaps feeling envious of another person makes it easier to turn them in, or perhaps fear of appearing to be jealous makes one overlook an obvious danger. Hall lays out a number of human circumstances that are complex on many levels, but she does so subtly, without hitting the reader over the head. In "En Voyage," it would have been easy to turn the character that represents the author's adoptive grandfather into a caricature, but Hall resists, drawing with careful strokes someone who has some bitterness over having to be rescued, yes, but still has a drive to succeed that makes him temper his negative feelings and focus on rebuilding a life for his family instead.

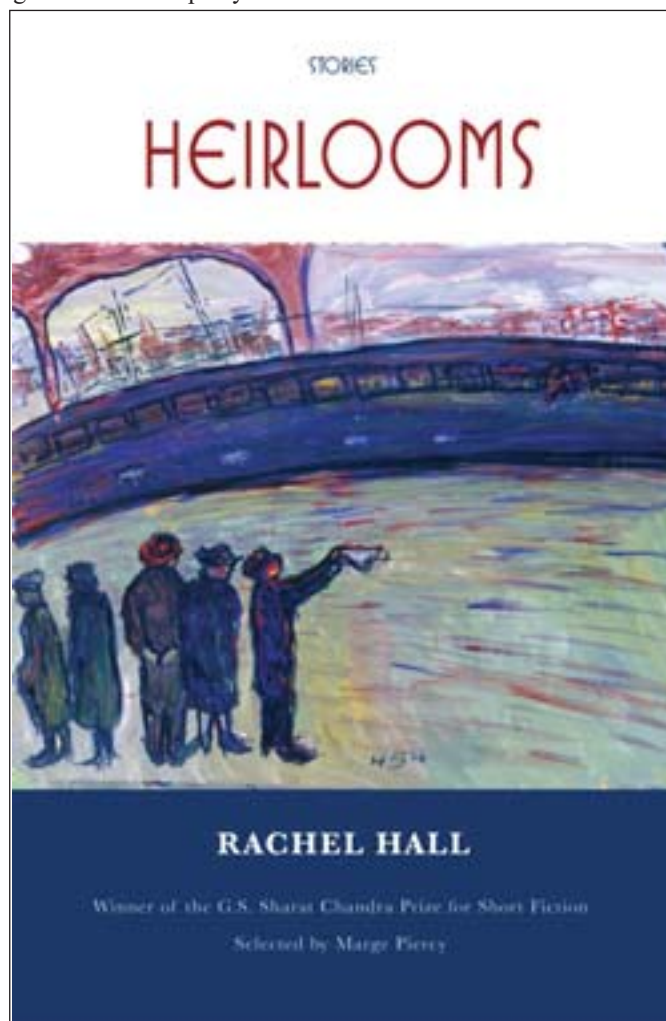
Hall decided not to directly tell the story of her real grandfather, the one who died in France, but rather to reveal him obliquely through the eyes of her other characters. The author initially did not want to be a character in her own book, but later

decided that she needed to be there to reflect on the effects of events as they played out over time.

Born in the United States, Hall is a professor at State University of New York, Geneseo, about a half hour north of her home in Rochester. She commutes to the historic village that houses the university, where she teaches creative writing. She lists as among her influences authors Elizabeth Strout and Alice Munro. Fiction, she says, is not memory. What fiction can do best is break down barriers; the power of imagination and empathy is what

fiction is all about. However, in addition to relying on family stories she had heard — which she says were already somewhat fictionalized by the time she heard them — Hall did careful research, including in France.

The author did a reading in Orinda earlier this month because she has a cousin living here. "Heirlooms," published by BkMk Press, won the G.S. Sharat Chandra Prize for Short Fiction and is available in bookstores, including Orinda Books.



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