

# Ongoing discoveries at Perlmutter gallery: 'Refuge' and 'Stranger Things' pop-up show

By Sophie Braccini



Jennifer Perlmutter in front of work by Susan Sharman and Susan Taira in her gallery. Photo Sophie Braccini

Jennifer Perlmutter is never afraid to take risks and venture into new art territory. She is a modern art painter who dared entering the gallery business three and a half years ago. Since then she has brought to Lafayette contemporary ambitious art that attracts curious local collectors and art lovers alike.

Two exhibits will follow each other this month and provide opportunities for very different types of discovery: the current show exploring connections to the natural world, "Refuge," and an Oct. 28 one night pop-up show tribute to the popular Netflix series "Stranger Things."

Entering the gallery next to Rancho Cantina is always a treat. The current exhibition, "Refuge," gathers work from Susan Sharman and Susan Taira who were students together at the California College of the Arts. Perlmutter says Sharman, who develops the graphics for the gallery's communications, proposed the idea of the joint show.

The idea behind "Refuge" is finding a grounding sanctuary in one's roots – both family roots as

well as the roots of nature. It is a very feminine show: some works are simply peaceful, others almost haunting.

For several years now Sharman has been working with needlepoint. Mixing craft work, paint, prints and family memorabilia she created a series of images deepening the exploration of her ancestry, from farmers and land explorers who preserved pressed flowers to pictures, journal entries, and ancient fabrics. She was particularly inspired by a beekeeper ancestor and created a bee's rendering with her needlepoint over family pictures printed on fabric.

Taira, a photographer and hiker who collects objects and natural ephemera she picks along the way, mixes her photos and objects, creating unique 3D displays that are evocative of the natural space around us, as well as a little mysterious and intriguing. The show ends Oct. 21.

At Halloween time, Martin Segovia will bring a very different vibe to the gallery. Perlmutter was immediately interested in the

idea of a pop-up show when the Lafayette artist proposed it to her. Perlmutter says that she loved the first season of the Netflix series "Stranger Things," which is available for viewing, with the second season starting at the end of this month, the day before the pop-up show.

Segovia, an illustrative artist, is curating the tribute show. He does portraiture, realistic portraits, marvel or icons like sport figures. He said he would find 11 artists for the Stanger Artists show, among them Jane Fisher who teaches art at Diablo Valley College and Jesus Anna Hernandez. Segovia's 11 artists commitment is to bring work to the gallery that night that is inspired by the "Stranger Things" characters or stories.

The exhibition's promotional card features one of Segovia's paintings of "Eleven," one of the series' characters and of the Upside Down, the show's other realm. Additionally that night the artists will create a live collaborative piece about "Stranger Things." Segovia's and Perlmutter's desire is to attract a younger crowd to the gallery.

Perlmutter knows it is a risk to offer something new like that in Lafayette. She is charging \$10 to enter that night, a ticket price that will include refreshments, a costume contest entry, and generous servings of Eggo waffles, the food the heroes of "Stranger Things" eat. The paintings will hang in the gallery until after Halloween.

Stay tuned for the November show that will also push boundaries, presenting Igor Caparibe, an augmented reality artist. "Refuge" runs through Oct. 21, and the one-night "Stranger Artists" show is on Oct. 28. For information, visit jenniferperlmuttergallery.com.

# Cancer-fighting superhero pens empowering book for children

By Kara Navolio



Photo provided

When Jessica Reid Sliwerski discovered the lump in her breast, her baby girl was only 3 months old. The 2000 Acalanes graduate was only 30.

"Just two weeks before I discovered the lump I remember thinking, 'My life is perfect: My career is going great, I love being a mom, I can't believe how lucky I am,'" Sliwerski said.

Her life didn't take the path she had planned, but now she sees her path differently. "After my diagnosis and treatment I knew I would do something to help other cancer survivors, I just didn't know what yet." Her ideas began to take shape in the form of a book for children. "I wanted to write a book that would help women feel empowered, that would remind them that they are brave, beautiful warriors, a book that would remind those who love them that they are a part of the healing process. Love and joy are essential to healing."

"Cancer Hates Kisses" (Dial Books 2017) was released in September. The picture book, illustrated by Mika Song, is geared for children 5-8 but will appeal to children of all ages. It starts out: "Mama is a cancer-fighting superhero." It demystifies cancer and puts it in terms kids can understand. She doesn't shy away from terms like chemo, radiation, and surgery. The book helps kids feel empowered to help mom or dad fight. Sliwerski adds, "Children give us the courage to keep fighting; their kisses and hugs keep us going."

Her prior work as an elementary school teacher, a principal, and a literacy advocate all came together

with her joys of writing and motherhood to create this book for children, which also speaks to adults. Mitch Center, a reader of an advance copy stated, "Thanks to Jessica for writing this beautiful book and for continuing to share the power of her story. I am wiping away tears. I lost my dad to cancer at 15 – a cancer that would probably be treated now but that he could not overcome in 1989. So kids with parents fighting cancer is real and raw for me, as it is for so many. I love that she wrote this, and that she shared this, and most importantly, that she kicked cancer's butt and that her daughter has been her inspiration and fighting partner."

Laura Maestrelli, a cancer survivor from Piedmont, added, "The first time I read (this book), it had me in tears with its combination of empowerment and honesty – it somehow perfectly captures what my husband and I wanted to say to our 4-and-a-half-year-old son when we talked to him about my cancer. And on behalf of all of us with young children who are fighting this disease, we thank Jessica for writing this beautiful book."

Sliwerski was diagnosed in 2014 with stage 1A breast cancer that was still small but very aggressive, a rare form called pregnancy associated breast cancer and affecting women in their 30s during pregnancy or within one year post-partum. The pea-sized lump was almost dismissed by her obstetrician at her 3-month post-partum checkup. But Sliwerski remembered a video she had seen at Acalanes High School about breast self-examination. The message from the film nagged at her: If you feel anything unusual you should not ignore it. "That video may have saved my life," she reflected.

After her treatment, Sliwerski and her husband, who had been living in New York, made the decision to come back to the Bay Area to be closer to her family in the Lamorinda area and to have more organic food choices.

Parents have asked her for another book, one that can help children who are fighting cancer themselves. Since the market for such a book is small, she is planning to self-publish this second book. She is in the process of setting up a Kickstarter campaign to raise the money needed for illustrations, printing and marketing. For updates, visit her website: www.msreidreads.com.

"I want to write books that are going to help people, that will change the world," stated Sliwerski. That's what superheros do. "Cancer Hates Kisses" can be ordered from local book stores or purchased on Amazon. Sliwerski will be reading her book at 3 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 14 at Diesel Books in Rockridge.



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