

Art Moves Project prepares its next creation

By Sophie Braccini



Leesha Zieber and Aaron Perlstein from Kambara + Dancers performed "Encased" on Bubble Wrap. Photo provided

One of the most thought-provoking and engaging art groups in Lamorinda, Art Moves Project, recently held a fundraising event that was also the launch pad of its 2018 project, "Encased." Last October's art performance, "Edifice: Uncovered," explored what is inside; this year's creation includes original music, dance, sculpture and audience participation, aiming at looking at what surrounds us when we leave our

comfort zones, both from a personal and community perspective.

On the grounds of a Happy Valley home, architects Zoë Prillinger and Luke Ogrydziak created a 15-foot high sculpture entirely covered with pink bubble wrap. Christy Mack, founder of Art Moves with Yukie Fujimoto and Lissa Resnick explains that the Bubble Wrap is central to this new project. "It symbolizes what we wrap around us when we want

to protect ourselves," she says, "either emotionally, or by living in a bubble. The AMP happening is made to explore and get people to think of what happens when we start popping the bubbles and peering through the transparent insulation."

The idea of "Encased" came after the 2017 performance, the fruit of a discussion between Mack and her friend Heather Ferguson (Bluewater Music in Nash-

ville) who wanted to explore what bubbles up in individuals when they are exposed to truly beautiful places, and what they uncover about themselves and about their relationship to their community. Fujimoto also wanted to discover what people are willing to see of their surroundings, the reality of what they experience.

During the April event, performers from San Francisco-based Kambara + Dancers danced on the pink bubbles following choreographer Yayoi Kambara's creation. As they danced, the bubbles started popping under their feet, creating a unique sound backdrop to the dance, which was rhythmic and energizing.

Oakland musician Marquise Moore created an original soundscape inspired by the Bubble Wrap. The idea, as explained by Mack, is that we can all live in our bubbles, but what happens and what do we see when we start popping them. Moore, Mack and her son Noah went to a sound studio and started recording sounds of bubbles popping, Bubble Wrap twisting, being stepped on, and some of these sounds were incorporated into the installation at the fundraiser. Another part of the atmospheric sounds were echoes of steps. This came from what the spectators experienced as they were invited to walk through the majestic and magical redwood grove that has

grown in that part of Happy Valley, holding on to each other, following two dancers who emerged from a pile of redwood shavings.

"Encased" is both an experiential event, where performance happens at a given time, and a display with the sounds and the sculpture. At this time, Fujimoto and Moore are recording words of people who were interviewed and asked about what surrounds them, what surrounds their community, and what encases them. The purpose is to find out what keeps people in, and what is found when the bubble is popped.

At the end of the performance in April, all the artists shared why they had participated in this project and what it meant for them. This will also be a part of the public performance in the fall. AMP envisions a full week of presentation performances, from Oct. 19-26.

The fundraiser was held so the artists that participate can be compensated. Other groups also contribute to Art Moves: Lamorinda Arts Council provides the legal umbrella and seed money; and the Moraga Valley Kiwanis was the first funder this year. The three women are also pursuing grants and business sponsorships.

At this time AMP is looking for a central place in Lamorinda where the free public events will be held in the fall.

Combining nature and spiritual messages to create award-winning art

By Kara Navolio



"African Spotted Eagle Owl" by Dwight Yassany

Lafayette artist Dwight Yassany has been creating stunning, life-like images of animals for only about six years but has received many awards for his spiritually-inspired work.

Two pieces, "African Spotted Eagle Owl" and "Indian Tawny Eagle in Flight" are currently on display at the Haggin Museum in Stockton. The 85-year-old museum hosts a juried exhibit biannually, coordinated with the Stockton Art League (SAL). This is Yassany's second time being accepted into the acclaimed show. Maria Flumiani, SAL Board Member and Chair of the Haggin Committee, stated, "We had 408 pieces submitted from artists in 18 states; 109 pieces were chosen by this year's Juror Sabina Turner, a watercolorist from Fiddletown, (Calif.) Dwight's work is one of the few pen and ink

artists we have. His nature-oriented work is well-known and beautiful."

"Indian Tawny Eagle in Flight" received an honorable mention in this show, his seventh award overall.

Yassany, who retired after over 30 years at the East Bay Municipal Utilities District, has three goals in his art. He wants to promote pen and ink as a fine art medium, and he wants to accurately represent the animals he draws, which is why he works from photographic observations but also consults reference material and expert opinions. His third goal is to provide a platform for spiritual references from the bible. In most of his works he blends in a biblical reference with the hope that viewers will see it and further investigate the meaning on their own. These references are

"hidden in plain sight" as natural shadings in feathers or, in the case of "African Spotted Eagle Owl," in the animal's eyes. Yassany stated, "I input biblical phrases or references with a theme for each piece, spreading God's word through His own creations."

The self-taught artist never received any formal art education except for a few art classes. Both of his parents had artistic interests and supported his drawing interests as a child growing up in the Sierra Foothills. He started pen and ink drawing seriously in 2011, working at first on a small scale as many pen and ink artists do. Now his pieces are large, about 30 by 40 inches, and can take up to 200 hours each to complete. Using a very fine-tip radiograph pen and making thousands of small marks on cotton paper, he uses a combi-

nation of soft and dark strokes to achieve the realistic renderings of birds and other animals. One of his favorite subjects is his 18-year-old cat Shasta (named for Mount Shasta).

Yassany's work has been shown in 20 exhibitions over the past six years, both locally and as far away as San Diego and Texas. He has a piece on permanent display in the Lafayette Library in the Art & Science Discovery Science Center titled "Lynx in Snow." His work has also been shown at the Lindsay Wildlife Museum and frequently in the Sacramento/Stockton area.

Yassany gains inspiration from the wildlife he sees in the Bay Area Open Space. "I'm fascinated by the birds of prey right now," added Yassany, who often sees red tail hawks while hiking in Briones, the Lafayette Reservoir and the De La Vega Trail in Orinda.

The exhibition at the Haggin Museum runs through July 15, Wednesdays through Sundays (1201 N. Pershing Ave., Stockton). For more information visit www.hagginmuseum.org or email Yassany at dwright0@att.net. His works and note cards printed with his images are available for sale.



"Indian Tawny Eagle in Flight" by Dwight Yassany.

Acalanes dancer vies for Beach Blanket Babylon scholarship

By John T. Miller



Conrad Rocha Photo Rick Markovich, Beach Blanket Babylon

Conrad Rocha, a senior at Acalanes High School, is one of three finalists for the

\$15,000 Beach Blanket Babylon scholarship in Dance.

Each of the finalists will perform live in front of family, friends and a panel of celebrity judges on Monday, June 4. One winner in each category – singing, dancing, and acting – will be presented with a \$15,000 check toward their college education.

Rocha has been playing piano since he was 6 years old and dancing since he was 9. He began at the Dance Connection

Performing Arts in Concord then moved to the Oakland School for the Arts and currently trains at Triple Threat in Livermore.

He will be attending the University of Southern California on a partial scholarship majoring in business of cinematic arts with a minor in dance.

Although Acalanes doesn't have a dance program, Rocha leant his talents to the yearly musicals during his four years there, appearing in "The Mystery of

Edwin Droad," and as Conrad Birdie in "Bye Bye Birdie." He also appeared in the Stars 2000 production of "Smokey Joe's Cafe," and partnered with Lauren Matson for a Latin dance in their festival this spring. He also was featured as a solo dancer in the Contra Costa Musical Theater production of "Grease."

Rocha was encouraged to submit a video to the Beach Blanket Babylon contest by Tamara Sparkles, his ballet teacher at

Triple Threat.

His influences go back to his grandparents, who met in a ballroom dance class. Rocha says he dances about 12 hours a week. "My family is quite musical and my parents have been tremendously encouraging in supporting all that I do."

Rocha's ultimate dream is to be a performer and choreographer. The talented teen also loves to act and sing.