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Spirit turned into art: a Moraga artist expresses her creativity

By Sophie Braccini



Dina Asna's jewelry.

Photos Sophie Braccini

Dina Asna may walk with two crutches and struggle a bit over natural obstacles, but there is nothing weak about the woman. The painter and jewelry maker of Iranian origin was told by her father since she was a girl that nothing was impossible for her, even if she was stricken by polio at 18 months old. Her life took her to different countries, following the spirit that guides her and relying on her multiple talents. She now blossoms as an artist.

Asna was born to a middle class family in Iran and she grew up there in the time of the revolution. She was good at math and science and when the mullahs took power she wondered if she would be able to pursue her dream of becoming a scientist. Then in the early '80s, a friend dared her to apply for a scholarship at the Goethe Institute to study in Germany. She did, and was accepted. This was her first big departure. She made a life for herself in Germany for 20 years, working in the computer industry,

getting married and having two boys. But her marriage failed, she lost her job, and as all doors started closing on her, another one opened, this time in Silicon Valley where she was offered to come participate in a technology project for eight months.

She put everything in storage in Germany and crossed the ocean with her two boys, ages 6 and 8. She rebuilt her life here, first in the financial industry, now in real estate, settling in Moraga and putting both her boys who are now in college through high school at Campolindo.

Now that her sons have left the nest Asna felt the artistic part of her that was always suppressed come forward. For a while now she has been painting, first acrylic and now mostly watercolors. Her graphic expression is both figurative and symbolic, representing her vision of courage, passion, serenity, forgiveness, abundance or opportunity in the form of portraits or representation of the natural world.

Her palette is subtle and soft, with bright touches of pink, oranges or blues. When she was asked to bring her art to a show in San Jose she realized that she could not let her work go, so she started thinking of ways to share it with the world while keeping the originals.

Asna's latest idea has been to print her work in a much smaller scale and create jewelry with the images. A pair of earrings match, but are different: one holds an oval pendant with a miniature portrait on one side, while the other features a detail of the portrait. Rings and necklaces are also created from the tiny paintings. The artist explains that she played with different types of lacquers to permanently protect the prints; it took a lot of trial and error.

In her new adventure she has found an unexpected partner, the one she calls her angel, who she says always looked out for her - her own mother who has come to live nearby from Germany where one of her brothers resides. Asna says fondly that her mother is her production manager.

Asna used to support her husband in Germany running his printing business and she knows what it takes to be successful. Now she is engaged in marketing her jewelry and putting herself out there. She created her own website, then joined Etsy to get a larger distribution channel and as a way to collect the very important customer reviews. She is also contacting all the local artist groups.

For now Asna is still a real estate agent. She says she loves to go out to visit homes with her clients in search for that perfect location, but the pull of her creativity is strong, ideas for expanding reproduction of her paintings on different mediums come all the time. She takes things as they come, one step at a time, with a deep desire to simply become a full-time artist. Asna's work can be found online at dinartgift.etsy.com.

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