

Published December 20th, 2023

## Paint Night at the Hacienda speaks to the inner Impressionist artist in all of us

By Vera Kochan



Students replicate a painting with their own personal touches Photo Vera Kochan

For those who have always wondered if they had any artistic talent, Paint Night at Moraga's Hacienda de las Flores was the perfect opportunity to explore any hidden Monet, Renoir, or Gauguin urges that heretofore have only touched the tip of the iceberg while repainting the kitchen or bathroom.

The Parks and Recreation Department-sponsored Dec. 13 event was held in the Casita building, and prospective artists were encouraged to bring their own food and beverages. It will be noted that a few bottles of wine were uncorked, which may have explained the mellow atmosphere in the room.

Independent Artist and Instructor Iilena Handy-Munoz provided all supplies which included table-top easels, 16 x 20-inch canvases, acrylic paints, brushes, and plastic aprons (just in case). Her first bit of advice was, "Relax" - something that became easier the more the wine

flowed. Her second mantra was, "There's no such thing as wrong (in art, anyway)."

Handy-Munoz was a late bloomer to the painting world when she first started in 2016 by attending "Sip and Paint" classes. The instructors were impressed with her skills, and she was asked to become one of them. Her hobby turned into a business venture when she co-partnered to open "Painting with a Twist" in Pleasant Hill. After becoming a mom, she sold her share of the business and now instructs via pop-up classes for kids, birthdays, showers, team-building, and at elementary schools such as Donald L. Rheem and Los Perales. Her 2-year-old toddler son has inherited her talent and love of painting, but ironically, her husband is color blind.

And so, to the sound of holiday tunes filling the air, nine men and women proceeded to create their take-home masterpieces. Using only three sizes of brushes, which Handy-Munoz dubbed Big Papa, Mama Brush, and of course the Baby, students were tasked to duplicate a painting that the instructor had brought to class. The painting was that of a lakeside scene with mountains in the background and trees in the foreground all in front of a sky that could be interpreted as either dusk or dawn. While some students panicked when they felt they'd made a mistake, Handy-Munoz assured them, "There are no mistakes that can't be corrected with paint."

As an observer, this reporter found it interesting that while the novices had a painting to copy for their point of reference, they each gave their works a personal interpretation, and any one of them could walk away with hang-worthy art.

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