

Creativity in Quarantine

How the coronavirus pandemic is panning art in La Jolla

By Elisabeth Frausto
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The COVID-19 outbreak and consequent shelter-in-place mandates are having a disastrous effect on many industries. As businesses close their doors in a unified attempt to slow the spread of the virus, those whose livelihoods depend on in-person interactions are closeted behind these directives and face both financial and personal struggles.

This is felt keenly among artists and the institutions that serve them.

“Artists have their emotions on their sleeves,” explained Erika Torri, executive director of the Athenaeum Music & Arts Library. “And artists are facing big disappointment” in the wake of mass venue closures. More than the disappointment, however, is the loss of revenue.

“The artists are devastated,” added Athenaeum communications director Lidia Rossner. She told the Light the Athenaeum canceled two exhibitions just after their March 13 opening, which at the time was reduced from a larger gathering to a smaller reception following then-stated health guidelines. Its satellite location, the Athenaeum Art Center in Logan Heights, had to entirely cancel its showings the next day, due to rapidly-changing CDC recommendations.

“No one will see their work,” Rossner mourned, noting artists are unpaid until their work is bought. Some support themselves through teaching, she explained, but galleries hosting their art are the primary source of income for most.

Torri, Rossner and their team are working to mitigate the effects the current lockdown protocols have had on the artists. The Athenaeum is now hosting its galleries and sales online.

“It’s great to start using social media,” Torri remarked, noting that



‘Madam B’ by Vita Sorrentino and ‘Into My Heart’ by Salli Sachse are among the works of art offered for view and sale at La Jolla Community Center’s online gallery in partnership with La Jolla Art Association.

“normally the Athenaeum would not have done that.”

She wonders, though, if it will be enough to sustain the artists.

“It’s a bit of a Band-aid,” she sighed. “The personal thing is missing,” an aspect critical to an artist’s success.

Artist Sally Hagy-Boyer, whose exhibition hangs in the abandoned-for-now Athenaeum gallery, confirmed to the Light: “You have to really see art in person.” Her canceled show represents more than a year of work, she said, for which she won’t be compensated unless the pieces sell online. “It’s been an emotional roller coaster. The last week was just awful; I didn’t know what would happen, and now, no one can see my work,” she shared.

Though she is grateful for the chance to have her gallery online, where it can conceivably reach more people, Hagy-Boyer is nonetheless distressed about not being able to interact with viewers one-on-one: “That’s where the magic is. One of the main reasons I make art is to show and share it at the end.”

Prudence Horne, another artist whose year-long efforts toward her Athenaeum show will also now go unpaid, commends the Athenaeum for “hustling on the angle to get work online,” but agrees the cancellation of the show “is still a total hit. I don’t think online sales will compare to in-person showings. People want to know me as an artist and person before they invest in my art. Exhibits are an opportunity for people to meet me.”

Other La Jolla art institutions are also working to support their artists in the wake of exhibitions being canceled. The La Jolla Art Association (LJAA), which partners with the La Jolla Community Center (LJCC) to use its space for galleries, has moved galleries for its April exhibits online, also hoping to help the artists sell their work there.

In the coming weeks, the LJCC plans to host several artists online, rotating weekly.

“For local artists who don’t have a following, we rely on the community at large to support them,” said LJAA president Nicole Caulfield. “We hope the online gallery sales will bring visibility to the work of 60 local artists,” and she noted sales also “directly support LJCC community projects and programs.”

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LJCC executive director Nancy Walters said she is hopeful about the online gallery launch: “This was one way we could promote and support local artists and provide the community with the healing beauty of art.”

The LJCC gallery will first feature the works of Salli Sachse and Vita Sorrentino, as well as a painting by LJAA founder Dottie Stanley. Stanley, who donated the painting to give back to LJCC programs, said the gallery will “provide a calming force during these times of uncertainty.”

The feeling of uncertainty is echoed throughout, but so are the strains of hope. Hagy-Boyer said: “I don’t know what’s going to happen next, but it’ll get better.”

Torri agreed: “Everybody is suffering right now, and we just have to get through. In these times, art gives everyone great pleasure. It’s good for the soul.”

■ **To view Athenaeum online galleries:**

- ljathenaeum.org/joseph-clayes-iii-gallery
- ljathenaeum.org/rotunda-gallery
- ljathenaeum.org/aac-gallery

■ **To view La Jolla Art Association online gallery:**

- ljcommunitycenter.org/artsale