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The creative talents of nine local women in the arts

nicole strasburg



Growing up in a house with three loud, energetic older brothers, landscape artist Nicole Strasburg often sought refuge in the bathtub, where she would float with her ears just below the surface to escape her siblings' constant noise.

"Being raised in a big family and being the youngest, I wasn't always heard," she explains. "Consequently, I think I have always searched for the quiet." Indeed, her serenity-infused landscapes stand in stark contrast to the frenetic energy of her early home environment.

Her father, an artist-turned-UCSB professor of set and lighting design, encouraged his children to express themselves artistically. Thanks to him, Nicole says, her love of painting was cemented early on; she spent many evenings lying awake in bed, breathing in the pungent, turpentine-soaked air as her father painted in the nearby garage, accompanied by the faint, crackling melodies of his transistor radio. By the time she reached high school, though, her interests leaned more toward math than art, and she began planning for a career in aeronautical engineering. But it didn't take long for Dos Pueblos High School art teacher Audie Love to recognize her talent and encourage her to trade her calculator for a paintbrush.

Today, Nicole is a study in balance. A free-spirited painter whose shimmering landscapes defy classification, she's also a savvy manager with a keen business sense. Give her daily routine some of the credit: During the morning hours she takes care of business, making phone calls and answering emails. Then it's off to the community pool for a swim. After a relaxing lunch, she settles in to paint, often well into the evening, engulfed by the evocative scents of

turpentine and oils.

Her work has shown and sold briskly in galleries in Santa Barbara, as well as nationwide. In July 2004, she received national exposure as the featured artist in Robert Redford's popular Sundance catalog. Strasburg's Pacific Ocean seascapes and southern Utah desert scenes resonated with catalog and online shoppers, who snapped up every last one. Currently you can find her work at Sullivan Goss in downtown Santa Barbara.

Nicole's landscapes are definitely not old-school, and she often deals with people's assumptions that she's a traditional landscapist. "I find it difficult to put myself in a category because I really don't fit into any of them," she says. "My images are more contemporary and minimal; I strip down the compositions to the feel of the space or an element of time in the land. I'm a realist in that my philosophy is that of a realist—my images are somewhat photographic, yet impressionistic in their feel. So, I would say my work is impressionistic with a contemporary edge."

Regardless of how she describes her work, it's a sure bet she will continue her search for the quiet with her paintbrush. —Kara Watkins

ana elisa fuentes



Photographer Ana Elisa Fuentes' heart belongs to a genre capturing images of spontaneous emotion displayed by ordinary human beings in often overlooked corners of the world. She developed her passion for photography at a very young age after spending countless hours gazing at the reflected emotions in her family's black-and-white portraits. What began as an early passion for documentary—with a Diana camera given to her by her

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