

summer 2004

coastal woman

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The Savage Art of Taking Risks

When we think of places to find artwork by innovative contemporary artists, we think funky Santa Barbara galleries, weekend art walks, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Ojai. But how about Westmont College? Most of us on the Central Coast have at least heard of Westmont, a small private college nestled in the hills of Montecito. We may know it for its Christian-based education, beautifully landscaped campus or successful sports programs. But how many of us associate Westmont with vibrant, cutting-edge art?

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Exciting things are happening in the art department on the small campus on the hill, and we can thank Susan Savage, a gracious, elegant and gutsy artist and chairwoman of the college's art department.

Susan received her bachelor's degree in art from UCSB in the early 1970s. She immediately jumped into her teaching career and accepted a position at Santa Barbara's La Colina Jr. High School. That same decade, she earned her master's degree in painting from UCSB and married fellow teacher

Dennis Savage. In the 1980s, Susan took a break from teaching and worked as a freelance designer and illustrator. In addition, she ran her own clothing design company, Cow in the Kitchen Wearable Art, for which she designed, painted and fashioned one-of-a-kind jackets.



Her association with Westmont College began in 1991 when she joined the art faculty as an adjunct assistant professor. Within a few years, she became a full-time faculty member, teaching painting, drawing, crafts and art education. Her tenure as chairwoman of the art department began in the spring of 1998, and under her leadership art has become one of Westmont's strongest and most popular majors. The fact that Susan encourages an environment of creative exploration and risk-taking may explain part of its appeal on campus.

"I'm big on asking students to take risks," she says, "and I

stress the power of reflecting on what that action produces in them. A student's artwork always reflects the person who created it; you can see it in the product. So it comes around that making art is a significant means of developing oneself."

Even with a schedule filled with teaching and administrative duties, she still manages to find time to work on her own art projects. A sought-after and respected artist, Susan has exhibited in juried and invitational shows since the 1970s, has headed the Santa Barbara Museum of Art education committee and is a member of the Contemporary Arts Forum. Naming Cezanne, Manet, Claudio Bravo and Janet Fish among her favorite artists, Susan says she is most often inspired by common, everyday objects.

"I am intrigued by the intricacies of the colors, shapes and textures that are revealed to me as I study and interpret seemingly simple forms," she explains. "I am continually

reminded that beauty and mystery can be found in anything if time is taken to look for it, study it and appreciate what might be revealed."

The college's Senior Art Majors Show, through May 8, rounds out Reynolds Gallery's 2003-2004 season and is an opportunity to discover fresh artistic talents among Professor Savage's risk-taking students. ★

For more information on Reynolds Gallery's exhibition schedule and for gallery hours, call 805.565-6162, or go to www.westmont.edu/reynolds_gallery/index.html

A simple silver bowl is the focal point of Susan Savage's newest body of work, collectively entitled, "Bearing Witness."

At left, the artist relaxes at home beneath one of her paintings.

