

Linda Ryan: Bringing a new appreciation for art to the Tri-Valley

BY PHILIPPA COELHO JACINTO
CORRESPONDENT

"I fell in love with the act of putting paint on canvas. It bounces back... it feels alive! There's something about paint that I respond to on a deeper level," says artist Linda Ryan with an expressive sweep of her hand.

As eloquent with words as she is with paint, Ryan, surprisingly, took her first painting class only seven years ago. Under the guidance of art teacher Bill Paskewitz at Livermore's Las Positas College, Ryan's flirtation with painting blossomed into full-fledged romance.

Born in 1958, Linda Ezell Ryan has always had an eye for beauty and an urge for creative expression. Over the years it has manifested itself in varied ways. Ryan has always been adept in black and white, charcoal and pencil drawings. When she was younger, she helped her mother in her arts and crafts business. At Cal State Hayward, she was a vocal major. She has also made a career in writing — studying publishing and even writing a novella of short stories.

"You can explore all those different talents, all those different interests, but if you don't focus on one you are not going to really experience it fully. So I decided I would finally learn to paint," says Ryan about her life-changing decision in 1998.

She began to exhibit locally in Livermore late the next spring and started a course of self-study in art history, composition and theory.

She delved deep into abstraction and explored the medium of acrylic gels. She also experimented with figurative work, using a

set of rubber-tipped tools. The events of 9/11 left an indelible impression on her art. A deeper concern for humanity led to more involvement with the human form. And, in turn, to the creation of over 100 abstract figurative works in under a year.

As Linda Ryan grew and evolved as an artist, she became very interested in helping other artists reach out to each other. "There's an energy created when you talk to other artists," she explains.

Linda Ryan moved to Livermore in 1992 and has grown to love the historic valley and its people. She has always been involved in ArtWorks Studios, then housed in the beautiful Schenone building in the heart of downtown.

"It was an incredibly vibrant artists' co-operative, says Tom Marchand who is currently running for the Livermore City council. Marchand had stepped in, in the early 2000s, to manage ArtWorks Studios. "It was exciting to be working with a number of individuals who were extremely creative. Creative energies came together and built upon itself in this wonderful, synergistic fashion," he adds.

Today ArtWorks Studio is looking for a new home. They are hoping to move into the Bothwell Center in the fall of 2005.

In 2002, Ryan organized the first Livermore Downtown ArtWalk. The event has grown every year since. Last year it attracted approximately 5,000 attendees in 2004 and showcasing the works of over 100 artists. At this time, "a lot more artists started coming out of the woodwork,"

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LINDA RYAN

continues to evolve and grow as an artist and her commitment to TriValley Artists Guild, as well as her fellow artists, never wavers. As a 2005 board member of Livermore Downtown, Inc., she hopes to stimulate the ongoing efforts to turn downtown into a cultural arts district.

Linda Ryan

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mentions Ryan. Together with fellow artists including publisher/artist David Collins, Ryan organized the TriValley Artists Guild to help promote contemporary art and arts education in the area and to produce ArtWalk. Ryan who is currently president of the Guild is totally committed to its vision and works tirelessly to raise funds for the upcoming ArtWalk on Oct. 15.

Ryan credits Livermore Downtown, Inc., for being extremely supportive of the arts. "We are trying to do a lot of different things," says Ryan. "Events that will help bring the art community together and bring the community to art."

The Art Banner project is another example of this partnership in action. This year around 20 area artists painted an array of banners that are currently displayed on First and Second Streets. Like ArtWalk, the Art Banner Project draws people to the downtown area to admire the art and enjoy shopping and dining at some of Livermore's finest stores and restaurants. Says Rachael Snedecor, Executive Director of Livermore Downtown, Inc., "Linda has always been our conduit to the art community. She is always there to help with outreach to the artists. I think she is phenomenal."

For Ryan, community involvement, art activism and her own personal growth as an artist meld together to shape her present and her future. Her solo exhibitions at the Danville Art Gallery, Garre Estate Winery, P.J. Rhae, Wente Vineyards Estate and Art of Presentation were very well received. Her work was

also part of several group exhibitions at ArtWorks Studios, The Thompson Gallery, ArtWalk and Buccis, amongst others.

Ryan has also organized seminars and workshops and was a teacher of experimental acrylics. Some of her artwork is part of select collections all over the U.S. and in the U.K. too. She has also accepted several commissions over the years.

Ryan best describes what it is that drives her as an artist. "I like to explore motion; experiment with a visual response to music; and try to create a connection with a figure's energy in paint," she states. Indeed, music and dance play a pivotal role in her art. She often dances while painting, letting the flow of the music direct her brush. "Dancing helps me keep my brushstrokes loose, large and expressionistic. I try to move beyond traditional nude or figurative painting to express the power inherent in the human figure," she adds.

Nancy and Ron Tenuta, owners of Tenuta Vineyards in Livermore, were introduced to Linda Ryan last year. "I fell in love with her art," says Nancy Tenuta who bought several paintings for their tasting room. She also organized a Saturday night exhibit of Ryan's paintings in the fall of 2004. "We sold a lot of art and wine," says Tenuta. "It was a very civilized evening of art and music." She describes Ryan's art as impressionistic and free-flowing. "It leaves a lot to the imagination," she adds. "Linda is also a very educated artist. And is highly diversified in what she can do."

Coming up in the fall, Tenuta plans to host another exhibition of Ryan's work. Also in the works is a New Orleans, Louisiana gallery exhibit that will feature some of her newest pieces with a jazz music theme. Ryan's work



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will also be part of the second annual exhibit titled '100 Nudes' at the Art of Presentation in Pleasanton on Oct. 6.

Ryan appreciates the support, exposure and the wonderful response to her art. As she continues to evolve and grow as an artist, Ryan's commitment to TriValley Artists Guild and her fellow artists never wavers. As a 2005 board member of Livermore Downtown, Inc., she hopes to stimulate the ongoing efforts to turn downtown into a cultural arts district. She also dreams of creating a network of artists, so that the community can keep in touch with each other.

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You can tell that the artists' community truly values Linda Ryan's artistic mission. One of the finest compliments we've heard comes from fellow artist Vera Lowdermilk of Livermore, "Linda is a very generous person. She puts a lot of her own time and energy into many artists' events downtown. She is a shining example of how one artist can help another because we are all inspired by one another's work."

For information about the TriValley Artists Guild, write them at P.O. Box 962, Livermore, CA, 94551. For Livermore Downtown, Inc., call 925-373-1795.