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Photograph by Erin Day

**Flowers in a Vase:** Local artist Sonya Paz will be featuring her acrylic cubist-style pop-art painting titled 'Eames Erotique Mod' in the South Bay Art Momentum show. Paz's artwork will also be seen on hundreds of Sausalito Art Festival T-shirts this year.

## South Bay artists hope exhibition event can give area's creative set Momentum

By Mary Gottschalk

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## Cover Story



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**Studio Work:** Rose Garden resident and Bellarmine College Prep art teacher Al Preciado works on an oil-on-canvas painting in his downtown San Jose studio recently. Preciado will have his ceramic sculpture titled 'Lovers' on display at the South Bay Art Momentum exhibition on July 9.

## South Bay artists hope exhibition event can give area's creative set Momentum

By Mary Gottschalk

Artists most often work alone, but there's nothing solitary about the South Bay Art Momentum.

More than 70 local artists, including several from the Rose Garden area, are banding together to spotlight their work and the local art scene.

"This drive is to make Silicon Valley well known for artwork, rather than just tech," says Devon Holzwarth, a Garden Alameda artist and one of the organizing committee members.

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Art Momentum's debut event is an exhibit at Le Petit Trianon, with each artist exhibiting one piece.

The opening-night party on July 9 goes beyond the usual cheese and wine reception, with both artists and guests invited to judge the art on exhibit.

"The aspect that appeals most to me will be judging by the artists themselves, so in a sense, we're all curators," says Al Preciado, an artist in the College Park area and an instructor at Bellarmine College Preparatory.

"Out of the 70-plus artists, 12 will be chosen by their peers and one by the public at large. As an artist, I think it's very fair. When we're being judged by an outside curator, they usually have a bias," Preciado says.

For the show, he's submitting a small figurative ceramics piece he's titled *Lovers*. He describes it as "two figures in a half boat."

The figures are nude and the piece may be too graphic for some.

Preciado is excited about the show and its significance.

"This is happening at the behest of the artists, rather than an institution. We're enfranchising ourselves, as opposed to letting others do that for us. It makes a more powerful statement," Preciado says.

Holzwarth points out, "It's going to be a very self-less night."

While participating artists will be given 12 votes, they aren't allowed to vote for themselves and they cannot vote for any piece more than once. Non-artists attending will be allowed three votes.

The top 12 artists' choices and the top guests' pick will remain on display at Le Petit Trianon through July 16 and then move to a Phantom Gallery space in downtown San Jose through August.

Art Momentum members are organizing exhibits in Europe for the 13 final selections after August.

Sonya Paz, who lives off Meridian Avenue, says she's encouraged by the energy going into the organization and this first show.

"It's not a 'here's my art, call me when it's done.' It's 'here's my art, what can I do to help?'" says Paz, who works most often in acrylics.

"I find there's so much more involvement with art in cities like San Francisco and Los Angeles, and it's nice to know San Jose is getting more involved," she says.

For this show, Paz has done a 24-by-30-inch painting she called *Eames Erotique Mod*, which she describes as "an abstract flower vase in a room

with a window and a bunch of fun elements floating around."

Paz's whimsical pop-art style caught the attention of the prestigious Sausalito Art Festival. She is one of only 260 artists selected to participate in the three-day juried show, which is considered the top outdoor fine-arts festival in the United States by ArtFair Source Book and is held over Labor Day weekend.

Even more impressive is the fact that the organizers so much like Paz's work, they invited her to design the logo for this year's festival T-shirt.

With more than 1,800 festival volunteers wearing the T-shirts, Paz says she believes it will be "cool to see people walk around with my art on their chest."

Another local artist participating in Art Momentum is Julie Valentine, owner of The Red Dragonfly on The Alameda.

Valentine has already given a workshop for Momentum members on creating websites for artists.

Of the upcoming show, she says, "Every opportunity that there is, particularly for San Jose artists, to get together and showcase our work as a collective body and bring awareness that there is art in San Jose and there are artists making art available to the public for viewing and for purchase—all of that is a good thing."

For the show, Valentine says she decided to experiment.

"It's a departure from my normal style of doing images of real women as goddesses, to do a style more whimsical and playful. This event gave me the opportunity to test an area I've always wanted to use in my art but haven't—photography."

The result is *The Release*, a mixed-media piece incorporating photography and textures.

"It was a release for me to do something different," Valentine says.

All the artists credit Martha Stephens, an artist and professional interior designer, for conceiving the idea of South Bay Art Momentum and providing needed impetus to get it going.

Stephens describes it as part "of my commitment to broaden exposure to art in our area."

In an invitation to friends, Stephens wrote, "As an interior designer and artist native to the South Bay area, I have long been concerned with the overall lack of local access and exposure to fine art. Despite the size and sophistication of our population, there are relatively few venues where art

is available for public enjoyment and acquisition."

Stephens hopes South Bay Art Momentum will change that.

The nucleus artists of Art Momentum all share the experience of participating in Phantom Galleries, where art exhibits occupy vacant storefronts, primarily in downtown San Jose.

Phantom Galleries is produced by graphic designers Cherri Lakey and Brian Eder, who operate both Two Fish Design and Gallery Anno Domini in downtown San Jose.

Phantom Galleries is part of POPULUS Presents, a public-space programming partnership with the San Jose Redevelopment Agency and the San Jose Downtown Association. POPULUS also presents Music After Dark, Gypsy Cinema and other activities.

"Martha was the foundation for getting it going," says Holzwarth, who also credits Lakey and Eder for allowing the group to meet at Anno Domini.

It was at these meetings, Holzwarth says, where "this current was created."

Holzwarth is best known for her wall murals, but for this show she's done a 4-by-5-foot painting she's titled *From Broken to Beloved*.

"It's a self-portrait that's impressionistic realism," she says.

Creating it was somewhat therapeutic, as Holzwarth says "it brings alive the account of my being able to overcome a dark time in my life when I was a victim of sexual assault."

Holzwarth says, "My hope is that this work can speak to others who have dealt with similar challenges in their lives, so that they'll be able to embrace their stories and become stronger individuals through the experience."

As they prepare for their first group show, Holzwarth and other members of South Bay Art Momentum visualize it becoming an annual event.

*The first South Bay Art Momentum Exhibition is 6 to 10 p.m. July 9 at Le Petit Trianon Theatre, 72 N. Fifth St., San Jose. The event is free. For additional information on this event, the show as it travels or the group, visit [www.artmomentum.org](http://www.artmomentum.org).*

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