



Fiercely Local News

Sunday, September 24, 2006

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- [Place an Ad](#)
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- [Religious Directory](#)
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- [Local News](#)
- [Schools](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Post an Announcement](#)
- ABOUT US**
- [Contact Information](#)
- [Circulation](#)
- [Philosophy](#)
- [History](#)
- [Executive Staff](#)
- [Employment](#)
- ARCHIVES**
- [Browse Past Issues](#)

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[Home](#) > [Rose Garden Resident Home](#) > News

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NEWS



Photograph by Vicki Thompson

Art Cause: Local artist Sonya Paz designs watches with her artwork for nonprofits. She is offering the limited-edition watch (center) to raise money for the National Breast Cancer Foundation. On each side are watches she designed for the Humane Society of Silicon Valley.

Paz, who lives off Meridian Avenue, creates bold, bright images, influenced by her love of modern art, pop art, cubism, modernism and surrealism.

Paz is not a cancer survivor, but she says, "I have had people affected with breast cancer in my life, people I'm related to or know really well. I felt we really need to give back and help to fight this."

Paz says it was always her intention to put "Passionate Survivor" onto a watch when she started painting the piece.

Everything in the picture, done in Paz's signature pop art style, is specific to breast cancer, she says.

"There are two houses to represent it's closer to home than you think," Paz

Sonya Paz puts local causes in public's eye with her art

By Mary Gottschalk

Sonya Paz has always been generous with her art, often donating one of her prints or a painting to area nonprofit fundraisers.

Now Paz is designating a portion of the sales of one of her watch designs to the National Breast Cancer Foundation.

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says.

"You don't know who is affected. It may be someone standing next to you at the supermarket, or in a passing car."

The smiling, red-haired woman depicted in the painting is wearing a pink scarf around her neck with a small pink breast cancer awareness ribbon on it.

In the top right corner is a bright sun.

"I always put a sun in my work to give it a good feeling," Paz says. "With most of my work, if there's a city or a landscape, I always put a sun. It has become a signature element."

Janelle Hall, president and CEO of the National Breast Cancer Foundation headquartered in Frisco, Texas, says she was drawn to the art on the watch immediately.

"It's very refreshing and lively," Hall says. "It captures the spirit of a breast cancer survivor. It has a lot of energy with the colors. There is just a vibrancy to it."

The "Passionate Survivor" watches are in a limited edition of 250, priced at \$150 each. Paz is donating 50 percent of the sale proceeds to the foundation.

Additionally, she gave 50 percent of the sale of the original artwork for the watch to the foundation.

Those percentages are much higher than many products tied in with breast cancer awareness, some of which give as little as 2 percent to 10 percent.

"We wanted to make sure we were giving a nice percentage," Paz says. "I didn't want to make money off the National Breast Cancer Foundation."

The first "Passionate Survivor" watch was given to Cindy Nunez, a close friend for more than two decades of Mark Kovich, Paz's significant other and her business manager.

Nunez, who was battling breast cancer at the time, lost her fight on July 20, leaving behind her husband and two young daughters.

Paz says she and Kovich are discussing doing another watch and other items in her memory.

"I want to do something with her name on it, like the Cindy Collection or the Cindy Series," Paz says. "I'm envisioning something like three faces--a mom and two girls, in her memory."

Paz, who grew up in Cupertino, was painting part-time for many years while she worked full time in high tech for Apple, Microsoft and Adobe.

When Paz's group at Adobe was laid off almost five years ago, she says she had to make some decisions.

"I had been showing my paintings in local coffee houses, at open studios and on my website. I thought I could go look for another web design job, along with 15,000 other people, or do it on my own terms," she says.

Working on her own since May 2002, Paz has met with success.

In 2004, Paz was not only one of just 260 artists selected to participate in the prestigious three-day, juried Sausalito Art Festival, she was asked to design

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the logo for that year's T-shirt. It was worn by more than 1,800 festival volunteers and purchased by many attendees of the fine arts festival.

That same year, the Palo Alto Festival of the Arts invited Paz to design both its T-shirt and poster, and El Sol Vineyards in the Livermore Valley commissioned an exclusive label from Paz.

In 2005, Paz designed the artwork for the San Ramon Art and Wind Festival, as well as art for the Baldwin Park Summer Music Series in Southern California and the cover illustration of the May issue of *Vine Times*.

The San Ramon Festival organizers asked Paz to do the poster again this year and a bench she painted for Ikea Canada was featured on HGTV's "Space for Living" this past spring.

Since 2004, Paz has worked out of a studio gallery at 1793 Lafayette St. in Santa Clara, near the Newhall Neighborhood.

The watch line, which is trademarked as Art, Captured in Time, debuted two years ago.

"Any artist can take their art and put it on a T-shirt or a mug. I wanted to do something not so common," Paz says.

"I like to create my own roads, not walk on roads already paved."

While each watch features Paz's art, she credits Kovich with the overall design.

"Mark has manufacturing experience and he decided on everything from the size of the straps to the number of holes to seeing that each watch emulates a small painting," Paz says.

"We work with a company that prints the watch faces out for us to ensure they don't fade. They are not printed on a piece of paper. We've spent extra time and cost. If my name's on something, it better be nice."

The nicety of the watches was confirmed when they were selected for inclusion in the 2006 Oscar nominees VIP gift bag.

The breast cancer awareness watch is the second limited edition series Paz has designed for nonprofit groups.

The Humane Society Silicon Valley is also benefiting from two earlier watch designs--"Wishful Thinking" portraying a dog with a bone floating in a cloud above and "Cat-itude" with a pop art cat staring out. Each sells for \$75.

Laura Fulda, director of marketing for the Humane Society, says she frequently wears the "Cat-itude" watch.

"I love the look on the cat's face; it's that 'I'm too busy to be bothered' look," Fulda says.

"Sonya's artwork is very bright and cheerful, and she gets to the essence of an animal's personality. Even though it's a modern cubist style of painting, you can look at that print and see that it's a cat with attitude," Fulda says.

In addition to her watches, Paz also has greeting cards, clocks, tables and a holiday ornament.

She says she's regularly approached about licensing her artwork, but her experiences in that area have not been positive.

"In the past, work went out that was not to my specifications. I don't want my

artwork ending up on a cheesy key chain or a doormat unless it's something I would use myself. I want to make sure it's not just thrown out there or put on a product just for the heck of it," Paz says.

To that end, Paz and Kovich are creating their own merchandise and handling the marketing and distribution.

"As much work as it takes, it is the path we've chosen to go with," she says. "We can control the quality of the work."

While her merchandise is making its mark, Paz's original art works are also doing well.

She's featured in galleries in California, Florida and Oregon and her work is in many corporate collections, including Boston Children's Hospital, San Francisco 49ers Foundation, Two Fish Design, Allstate Insurance and Adobe Systems Inc., her former employer.

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