

By Joan Tapper



Fanny Seimandi and Julien Leprieur exhibit contemporary art from the Caribbean in their sleek, white-walled eponymous gallery. Their autumn show included tropically inspired pieces (behind them) by Dora Vital.

Showcasing Creativity

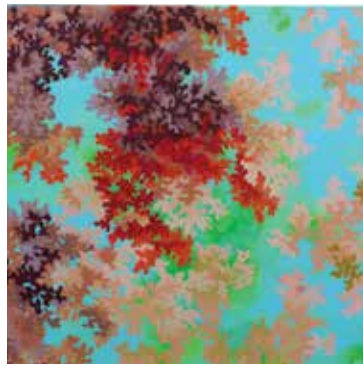
SEVERAL NEW GALLERIES EXPAND THE LOCAL OPTIONS FOR CREATORS AND DEVOTEES OF ART.

French Twist

It takes a certain leap of faith to start an art gallery, but Fanny Seimandi and Julien Leprieur, the couple behind **Seimandi & Leprieur** (seimandleprieur.com) have made radical moves before. They were living in France, where he was an engineer and she was a judge, when they

decided to make a change. Seimandi requested a reassignment to the overseas department of Martinique, and there, the pair became collectors and advocates for the serious artists on the Caribbean island while she continued on the bench.

"We never thought we'd be there 10 years," >



says Seimandi, adding that she had always been interested in art and had previously earned a master's degree in art market at Sorbonne University and completed an internship at the contemporary art center

in the Palais de Tokyo in Paris.

A love of American culture and the Santa Barbara lifestyle brought the couple to the West Coast, where they saw an opportunity to offer dynamic, large-scale works of well-established Caribbean artists to a new audience. They opened their gallery in downtown Santa Barbara in July, and their second show included vivid lush canvases by Dora Vital, whose work will be the

Vital's solo show, *Jardin Nocturne*, extends the floral theme (clockwise from top, left): *Crepuscule Tropical*, *Canopée 1*, *Canopée 7*.

sole focus of *Jardin Nocturne*, which opens December 4 and runs through February 21.

For that exhibit, Seimandi enlisted fashion photographer and Vital admirer Jen Huang Bogan as cocurator. Bogan chose paintings that “evoke the winter solstice, when daylight is softened yet not bleak,” she says, “and works that serve as an invitation for introspection.”

It seems that Seimandi's and Leprieur's leap of faith has landed on fertile ground.

A Window of Opportunity

When it comes to promoting art, Cassandra C. Jones thinks outside the box. In the past, she has organized a pink-themed show in a vacation home for a group of her fellow Ojai artists, inaugurated a thriving artists' residency program at the area's Taft Gardens & Nature Preserve, and has now founded **The Mega Gallery** (themegagallery.com). In this 8-by-10-foot space at Arcade Plaza on Ojai's main drag, the art is visible only through the storefront window.

Jones took over the venue (formerly the artist-run Spore Space) in August, and the first group show, *10,000 Easy Steps to Achieving Your Best Life*, brought together 30 artists who illustrated posters with affirmations (some of which Jones had written), not for individual self-help but rather for collective well-being. The works covered the space from floor to ceiling and wall to wall. Visitors—in person or online day or night—could enjoy the works and scan a QR code to buy a piece of art. “It's kind of like an art vending machine,” Jones says. As for the gallery name, she adds, that is her affirmation “that big things can come out of small places. There's good—and great—art everywhere.”

Opening on December 11 for one month is *Ojai: The Experience*. Once again there are artist-created posters, but this time they'll be touting a class or activity designed and offered by a local

Thinking Inside the Box

You've probably heard of Little Free Libraries—but now, there's a **Tiny Free Art Gallery** (@tinygallerysb). Set in a diorama in the Samarkand neighborhood of Santa Barbara, it displays diminutive artworks that are free for the taking. And anyone who is so inclined is encouraged to leave a creative piece of their own.



TOP LEFT GROUPING: DORA VITAL; BOTTOM: JENNIFER OLSON

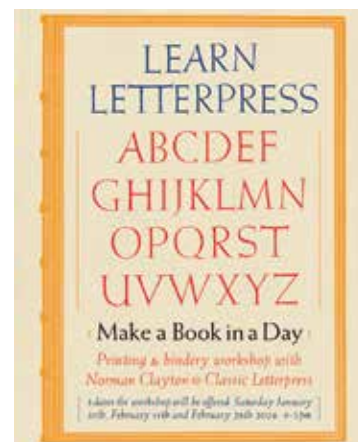


Artist and curator Cassandra C. Jones (above) makes an in-gallery appearance during the run of *10,000 Steps to Achieving Your Best Life*. The Mega Gallery's holiday exhibit, *Ojai: The Experience*, features posters (right) offering workshops, classes, and other activities by local artists, plus digital images of the art.



creative—basket weaving with fiber artist Carol Shaw-Sutton, letterpress and bookbinding with master printer Norman Clayton, or a listening party with musician Mikael Jorgensen of the band Wilco, for example. Along with a ticket to the experience (to be redeemed after January 11), purchasers will receive a digital 8.5-by-11-inch image of the poster, ready to be printed and gifted for the holidays.

"I want the gallery to be truly experimental," says Jones, who likens the world's art market to a garden that's "currently in the fall stage, going into winter. I want to be part of the sprouts of the future," she says. >





Irene Chan (bottom, on the left) and Bonnie Rubenstein host a new show, *Earth That Remembers*, at their gallery in the Palm Avenue Lofts through the month of December. Featured are works like (from left) *Viewing the Half Moon*, by Hung Viet Nguyen; and *Diozanine Sun* by Wrona Gall.



A Lofty Ambition

Longtime art gallery operator Bonnie Rubenstein and photographer Irene Chan describe finding the way to their gallery, **Rubenstein Chan Contemporary Art** (rubensteinchan.com), as something of a treasure hunt. But it's actually an easy ride down Palm Avenue in newly burgeoning Carpinteria to the Palm Avenue Lofts residential/professional complex, where the business partners house their spacious and inviting gallery.

They launched the venture in September with a three-artist exhibit called *Unfold*, and by November, they had already opened their second show, *Earth That Remembers*, featuring colorful cloudscares by Ojai artist Wrona Gall and highly textured fantastical landscapes by Los Angeles-based painter Hung Viet Nguyen.

"We're looking for artists who have a different point of view," says Rubenstein, "things we're not seeing a lot of, artists from other cultures, perhaps." The feedback from the public has been great, she notes, and the response from artists who are eager for a new place to show their work is especially positive.

To heighten awareness of the space, she and Chen coordinate exhibit openings with other artists' studios or galleries in the enclave. They're also planning a small retail section called The Bean, in homage to the Palm Avenue Lofts' past as a lima bean factory. There, they'll offer books, some crafts, work by a Palm Avenue Lofts ceramist, and small art pieces. Looking forward, they'd love to organize events, Rubenstein says, "to make other people find us—workshops, poetry readings, jazz jams. We're open to proposals!" ♦

