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ON HOLIDAY

from the caribbean to california

With deep ties to the Caribbean art scene, Fanny Seimandi and Julien Leprieur invite visitors of their downtown gallery to explore contemporary art in an immersive and transformative way that sparks both conversation and feeling.

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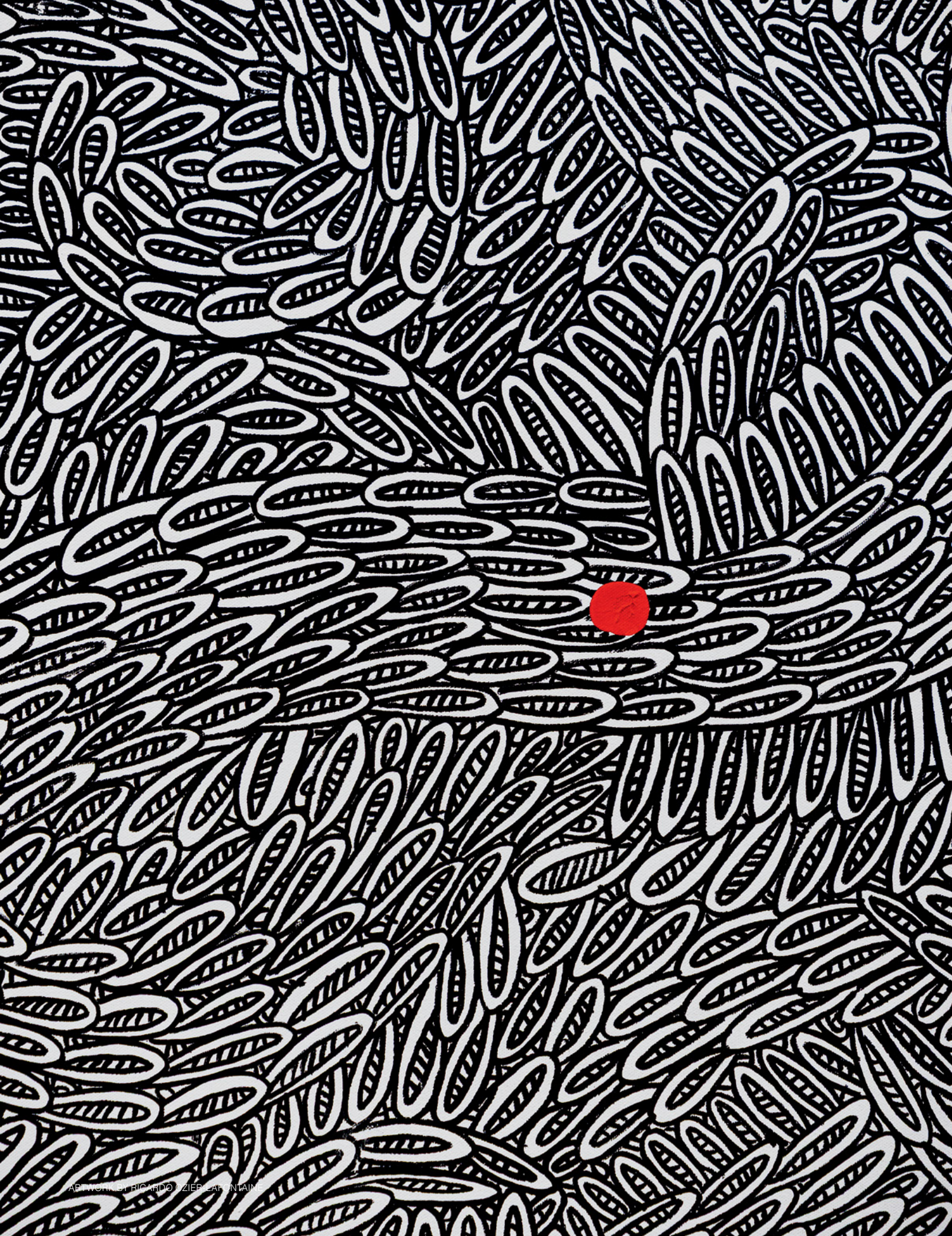
PHOTOGRAPHER
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When I walk into Seimandi & Leprieur, I forget where I am. Bathed in soft light and adorned with stunning artwork, the gallery feels like a reverie lifted straight from the Left Bank. Founders Fanny Seimandi and Julien Leprieur are mid-photoshoot for their upcoming exhibition, WHOSE PARADISE?, murmuring to each other in French as they arrange final details. Seimandi greets me with a warm smile and a kiss on each cheek, and we settle at a table topped with homemade pastries and tall glasses of sparkling water. For a moment, I could swear I’m in France. But I’m not—I’m in downtown Santa Barbara, at the city’s most intriguing new destination for contemporary art.

Many contemporary art galleries can feel cold or austere, but Seimandi and Leprieur have struck a rare balance between sophistication and sincerity. Despite the space’s polished design and the couple’s ambitious curatorial vision, this sunny corner of Santa Barbara radiates warmth and openness. “We are committed to

creating a space that is both intellectually stimulating and genuinely welcoming,” Seimandi says. A sense of ease is woven into every detail—from the gorgeous natural light to the thoughtful pacing of the exhibition—inviting visitors to slow down, engage in conversation, and feel at home in the presence of art.

It’s an experience Fanny Seimandi knows intimately—her childhood was shaped by galleries and exhibitions. Though she spent fifteen years as a criminal judge, she also earned a Master’s in Art Market Studies from the Sorbonne, completing her graduate internship at the Palais de Tokyo, one of Europe’s leading institutions for emerging contemporary art. Her partner, Julien Leprieur, is a trained engineer with a deep appreciation for contemporary art. The visceral impact of Ricardo Ozier-Lafontaine’s large-scale works inspired him to master the technical craft of exhibition production: lighting, transport, and conservation.



ARTWORK BY RICARDO OZIER-LAFONTAINE



“This is a gallery that doesn’t just display art—it immerses you in a space where *emotion*, *history*, and *nature* collide.”

The couple spent a decade in Martinique, where they were profoundly moved by the Caribbean’s vibrant contemporary art scene. Through the exhibitions and archives of the Fondation Clément, they built relationships with artists whose work now appears in institutions across Europe and the U.S. Drawn to American culture, they chose Santa Barbara as home for its architectural beauty, cultural openness, and thriving community of collectors. In the heart of downtown, they reimagined the former Bluebird Café—a 1970s music venue—into a luminous gallery that meets international exhibition standards.

Seimandi and Leprieur see a major opportunity in their Central Coast home. “Santa Barbara deserves a place on the contemporary art map, in dialogue with major international art scenes,” Seimandi says. Open just earlier this summer, the gallery is already gaining notable visibility. The artists represented have also exhibited in leading institutions worldwide—a testament to their discerning and thoughtful curation. Among them is Pierre Roy-Camille, whose work was selected by Hermès for its Shanghai window displays. “We want to bring Santa Barbara a contemporary program that could just as well take place in Paris, New York, or Los Angeles,” Leprieur says.

Stepping into the gallery feels less like entering a room and more like being swept into a vivid dream—charged with color, memory, and emotion. The current show WHOSE PARADISE? is a group exhibition featuring five artists exploring the Western idealization of tropical paradise versus the lived realities of the Caribbean, with its layered histories, social tensions, and environmental challenges.

The energy is immediate. Karine Taïlamé’s electrifying canvases are filled with nearly-neon hues that swirl with tropical heat. Thick layers of paint form three-dimensional flowers that rise off the canvas, pulling viewers into a lush, sensual geography. Just beyond, the palette flips. Ricardo Ozier-Lafontaine’s labyrinthine black-and-white compositions offer a meditative counterpoint. Created amid the social unrest of 2024 in Martinique, his intricate works use scattered floral motifs as symbols of resilience, elevating painting to an act of therapy and resistance.

A few steps away, the mood turns introspective in Pierre Roy-Camille’s archival dreamscapes—built from figures drawn from old journals and illuminated by grids of

light that reveal and obscure in equal measure. The artist invites visitors to linger in the quiet tension between presence and absence.

Along another wall, Anabell Guerrero’s stark black-and-white photographs confront nature in its rawest form, with towering trees, jagged cliffs, and stormy seas. Here, nature is not decorative, but a powerful force that’s majestic but also menacing.

And finally, Dora Vital’s soft, layered oil pastels offer a quiet escape. Through subtle glimmers of light emerging from dark backgrounds, she conjures a tropical world that feels secret and far removed from postcard clichés. This is a gallery that doesn’t just display art—it immerses you in a space where emotion, history, and nature collide.

For Seimandi and Leprieur, this has always been the vision. “Our curatorial approach is rigorous and independent—we aim to go beyond trends and create meaningful dialogues,” Seimandi says. “Each exhibition is conceived as a narrative, a piece of research—not just a display of artworks.”

This narrative extends far beyond the current exhibition. The gallery tells a richly layered story of the Caribbean’s small islands, bringing together French, Caribbean, and international artists. At its heart lies a steadfast commitment to foster meaningful conversations between Europe, the Caribbean, and the United States, while embracing the evolving currents of contemporary art.

Looking ahead, that vision turns inward, grounding the gallery in the local community. Beginning in 2026, Seimandi and Leprieur will launch an educational initiative spotlighting the work of UCSB art students. Their mission is clear: to cultivate a space that is accessible, dynamic, and inclusive. “We believe in art’s power to connect cultures, histories, and communities,” Leprieur says.

I glance again at the glowing artworks and listen to the hum of voices on opening night. What unfolds around me is the very vision they spoke of: a space that invites both connection and contemplation. Just months in, Seimandi and Leprieur have created their own paradise—right here, on the corner of Anapamu.*

WHOSE PARADISE? will be up through November 22nd