



Photograph by Jeff Kearns

Potter Bob Nicholson with some of his horsehair pots, which he makes by firing the pots at 1,800 degrees, taking them out of the kiln and laying single strands of horsehair across the hot clay.

Fired Up

Sunnyvale artisans display their wares during Silicon Valley Open Studios 2002

By Jana Seshadri

Art aficionados are in for a treat. During the Open Studios on April 27 and 28, the public will have the opportunity to view and appreciate a variety of fine art by touring the artists' homes and workshops in Sunnyvale neighborhoods.

With the general feeling that fine art is expensive and inaccessible to the general public, people tend to shy away from it. However, spearheaded by a small group of artists in 1985, the Open Studios event aims to introduce the general public, art enthusiasts, educators and collectors to the wide range of artwork created by artists who either live or work in Silicon Valley.

"It's a tremendous opportunity to meet people face to face," said Bob Nicholson, a Sunnyvale artist who works with ceramics and pottery. "People love to learn more about what we do."

Specializing in southwestern motifs, Nicholson's pottery is comprised of smooth bowls and mugs in white or brown clay with either matte or glossy finish. Some of his pottery pieces have decorative painting on the outside, while some are strikingly plain and stark. Nicholson also uses the "horsehair," a Native American technique, which gives his pottery a unique design.

"The horsehair technique is extremely difficult because we have to work with the clay while it is glowing hot," he said.

Exercising great caution, he first removes the piece of pottery at 1,800 degrees Fahrenheit from his electric kiln, using gloves and tongs. Horsehairs are placed on the hot surface to form a random design, a matte or glossy glaze is added after it cools and then the piece is fired again at 2,600 degrees.

While Nicholson admits that one doesn't have complete control over clay because it is extremely hard to work with, his mastery of the art is evident in the symmetrical clay and ceramic creations he has displayed in his workshop. Nicholson said his ceramic pieces range in price from about \$5 to \$300.

Nicholson and his wife, Cindy Couling, are members of the Sunnyvale Artists' Cooperative, which is essentially a group of six friends--Nicholson, Couling, Linda Astill, Phyllis Lee, Liz King and Susan Worley--who get together in Nicholson's garage/workshop and create their artwork.

Besides creating art on the computer as a graphic designer, Couling paints whimsical designs and caricatures on self-created ceramic plates of different shapes to use as decorations--either as wall hangings or as display pieces. Using the line-o-block technique, Couling also makes handmade greeting cards and prints. The information about the cooperative is available on their Web site at www.couling.com/sac.

"We sell fun little pieces for as low as \$2 or \$3," Couling said.

Without having to account for overhead and gallery expenses, artists are able to price their work reasonably, which in turn makes art affordable for the public.

"There's only the registration fee that the artists have to pay," said Liz Kraft, member of the board of directors of Open Studios.

Paintings automatically come to mind when one thinks of fine art. Artist Nina Yang--a Sunnyvale resident for the past four years--uses oil paints to create images with great depth and feeling.

Yang said she has two themes--flowers and galaxies. Her technique however, is not to paint each separately, but to combine the two.

"The way Nina paints a rose is much more profound," said Howell Hsiao, Yang's husband and business manager. "Her roses and galaxies are so similar."

With artistic expertise, Yang blends the never-ending space of the cosmic world with the beauty of a colorful flower. While keeping one part of her picture in sharp focus, Yang fuses the colors and shapes around it, thereby lending a three-dimensional effect to the painting.

Yang received her training at the Parsons School of Design in New York and the San Francisco Art Institute. Yang said she draws her inspiration from a lot of native California flowers, but uses flowers from all over the world in her paintings. Some of her work can be viewed on her website at www.ninayang.com.

On a different wavelength, artists like Remarque Loy are combining different skills and techniques to produce unique creations with mixed media. Besides being a graphic designer for the past 20 years, Loy said he has been painting all his life and loves photography. Combining his artistic skills and modern technology, Loy uses a technique he first employed four years ago--technoism.

"It's very unique," Loy said. "You don't see anything like it out there."

Loy explains hesitantly, for fear of revealing his trade secret. He said he first scans pictures or live objects--like flowers--into his computer. With the help of the heat transfer method, he then transfers the print onto wood or fabric, enlarges the print--sometimes up to 8 feet by 4 feet--applies glaze or varnish, and, finally, paints over it.

Loy works collaboratively with Dana Kawano to promote their combined effort at technoism.

"We've recently completed decorating a restaurant in San Mateo using Loy's technique," Kawano said.

Catering to the restaurant's requirements to reduce their sound and noise levels, Loy and Kawano created twenty 6 foot by 9 foot fabric scrolls to adorn their walls and window spaces.

Besides teaming up with Loy and displaying their work at Open Studios for the past three years, Kawano said she does sculpting in stone independently.

Loy's studio is located at 1002-A Wolfe Road in Sunnyvale, and he can be reached at 408.530.9562.

Some artists, such as Carlene Fulton, have migrated from other fields into art. Fulton was involved in teaching and training while she was a nurse, frequently writing "all over the board."

Fulton said her love for the written script took her over and she joined the Friends of Calligraphy Guild in 1976 and later the Pacific Scribes in 1982. With 140 members, the Pacific Scribes mainly consists of calligraphers in the South Bay, Fulton said.

For people who think calligraphy is all about writing letters, one visit to Fulton's home studio would be sufficient to change their minds. With a combination of ink, watercolors and colored pencils on handmade paper, cold pressed paper, fabrics and acrylics, Fulton transforms her writings into works of art. She reinterprets the English alphabet in many creative and different ways. With brush strokes of different lengths and styles, each letter looks like an individual work of art, and the letters have all been combined to form an attractive whole.

Fulton, who has taken part in Open Studios for seven years, has artistically used quotes from famous people like Winston Churchill, by nestling them in with appropriate artwork and framing them. She uses materials like acrylics, fabric, feathers and paper to create collages, and makes greetings cards from pressed flowers on handmade paper.

Starting from \$3, Fulton's artwork is sold for up to \$500. Fulton's studio is located at 1364 Sydney Way in Sunnyvale, and she can be reached at 408.733.5726.