

FIVE ARTISTS CONTINUE
VISION OF ORIGINAL
PLACITAS HOLIDAY SALE
—Oli Robbins

*Placitas Holiday Sale organizers
(l. to r.): Mary Hofmann,
Nancy Couch, Bunny Bowen,
Dana Patterson Roth, Jon Couch.*

Behind every great work of art is a great artist. The same can't always be said of a great art show. Most successful art and craft fairs are put on by promoters—often art enthusiasts, but rarely artists. The Placitas Holiday Fine Arts & Crafts Sale is an exception. Entering its thirtieth year, the Placitas Holiday Sale continues to attract art-loving shoppers and high-end exhibitors largely because its organizers—Nancy and Jon Couch, Bunny Bowen, Mary Hofmann, and Dana Patterson Roth—are also local artists, intimately familiar with the unique character of Placitas and attentive to the desires of its plethora of talented artists.

That the sale has never charged entry for visitors reflects the fact that its organizers are artists themselves. Says Nancy Couch, “We want people to come here for free and buy art, support the artists.”

Bowen agrees, “I always looked forward to it as a place to see people, visit with people, and just have a wonderful time with the other artists, with my own community.”

Placitas artist, Peaches Malmaud, passed the show on to the Couches over a decade ago, confident that they would maintain the sale's spirit. The Couches knew they couldn't do it alone, so they sought help from Hofmann who, like the Couches, had been involved with and showing at the sale since its inception. Soon after, they joined forces with Bowen and later Roth, who has been the promotional photographer for the sale since the



beginning, and currently produces the sale's television commercial.

The Couches were among the exhibitors at the first holiday sale thirty years ago. At the time, both were woodworkers—Jon was a carver and cabinet-maker, and Nancy made boxes and tables. Now the Couches are renowned for their glass prisms, which they started making in the months preceding the inaugural show. Nancy learned about the concept of glass prisms from a glass-blower friend and fell in love with the rainbows the prisms create. She conducted her own research and became enthralled by the color theory of and refraction experiments by Sir Isaac Newton, who developed the first water prism. Nancy and Jon exhibited several different styles of prisms at the first show and sold out. Then, as now, customers were fascinated by the prism's capacity to dance and move, enlivening the space around it and demonstrating the harmonious relationship between light and water.

The Placitas Elementary School gymnasium, where Bunny Bowen will exhibit her batiks, is the exact place where Bowen learned how to make batiks back in 1980, during a week-long workshop taught by Australian artist Jeffrey Service. Bowen had grown

interested in dyeing after studying Hispanic weaving and subsequently wanted to “put images on cloth in color.” Bowen never learned to weave but she, like the Navajo weavers, works according to the rhythm of nature and its seasons. Though Bowen is rooted in Placitas and inspired by the colors and shapes of its landscape, she has shared her work and process on a global level, spending time in Japan, studying R-zome, the Japanese wax-resist process, and speaking at a batik conference in Malaysia. Bowen was recently part of a show entitled, “Signs of the Past,” for which she created hangings of animals missing from this ecosystem, like grizzly bears and wolves. After cutting a stencil of the animal, she mopped wax on through the stencil so that the animal appears white, like a ghost.

The pottery of Mary and Karl Hofmann has been a permanent feature of the Holiday Sale since its earliest days. The Hofmanns became artistic collaborators and partners fifty years ago when they realized that, as Mary puts it, “We shared an interest in art and a certain approach to seeing the world.” Mary is a trained painter and was working on her Masters when she met Karl, who became interested in pottery while in the army in Japan, where

he was exposed to Japanese ceramics. Mary hopes someday to return to painting, but for now, her focus is pottery, and her slab pieces—like butter dishes and snack trays—have proved popular among Holiday Sale shoppers. The Hofmanns don't conceive of their works as solely functional, and indeed, judging by the number of Placitas homes that proudly display their pottery, neither do their customers. Says Mary, "A pot is not just a pot, it's a sculptural piece that occupies space. A bowl is a volume, and the connective space inside the handle is just as important as the outside shape of a pot or bowl."

Dana Roth, who has been the publicity photographer for the Holiday Sale since day one, is a more recent exhibitor—embarking on the journey of fine art photography a few years ago. Roth has been drawn to photography since childhood, when she used \$10 and a coupon off the back of a milk carton to buy herself her first camera. She has been shooting her surroundings ever since, but it wasn't until 2008 that she felt it was her time to take a leap and devote herself to honing her creative abilities. Roth is a native New Mexican and, as an "outdoors person," has always enjoyed observing the interaction between light and nature. "I'm constantly mesmerized by the New Mexico landscape and am always trying to capture light, shadow, and movement." Her photographs feature the local landscape and the moods of New Mexico, and she is currently working on a series that juxtaposes natural New Mexican grasses with altered or manufactured grass, illustrating the effect of humans on nature.

Founded by and for artists, the Placitas Holiday Sale continues to be predicated on the idea that art can foster and create community. As Bowen explains, "A lot of us have been activists for a long time, and the holiday sale is a real core group of us. The whole community becomes involved. It's like a fabric with little threads running through — it's a very complex tapestry.



c. Dorothy Bunny Bowen
"Bosque Fires"
Rozome on Kimono Silk
by Bunny Bowen



c. Water Prisms
"The Great Star," glass art
by Jon and Nancy Couch

c. Hofmann Pottery
"Chip And Dip," functional pottery
by Karl and Mary Hofmann



c. Dana Patterson Roth
"Los Brazos Between Water And Sky," photograph, by
Dana Patterson Roth



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