



OJAI STUDIO ARTISTS

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See Art Thrive – Enjoy the 2009 Ojai Studio Artists Tour October 10th & 11th, 10-5

Ojai, CA – August 20, 2009. For living proof of how resilient people can be in tough times, look no further than the art they produce. This year's Ojai Studio Artists (OSA) annual tour will prove that art can not only flourish, but thrive, during the most challenging of times.

On the weekend of October 10th and 11th, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., the public is invited to visit the working studios of 39 OSA members including three who are new to OSA this year. Whatever the medium, from stone sculpture to acrylic paintings or black-and-white line drawings, the artists look forward to showing visitors their latest work – and discussing the influences and motivations that inspired them.

A number of OSA members feel that the problems we currently face, as a culture, have had a significant impact on their output as artists. For example Christine Brennan, when asked about new directions over the past year, said “in response to the slow economy, I have been working on a line of tiny paintings I call Recession Busters.” They are done on scraps of hardwood and sold unframed at a fraction of the usual cost for her work.

Another OSA member, Sylvia Raz, takes a more political tack. Well-known in Ojai for her humorous public work *The Early Bird Shopper* perched in the Arcade, she is affected by her perception of “the rotten state of affairs in this country, the feeling that people are indifferent to any call for morality. Meaning that, as an artist, you have to use brutal means in order for your message to be noticed.” Visitors to her studio will see what she means by “brutal” in her current work.

Gayel Childress, one of the founding members of OSA known for her exuberant, often whimsical work, also finds herself moving in new directions. “I'm painting landscapes in a new, experimental way,” she says, “using more of an abstract view, with lots of scratching away at the surface to get to the color below. I am also interested in a more expressive way of painting the figure.”

One of OSA's new members, Carlos Grasso, uses realistic technique to portray figurative concepts. Born in Buenos Aires and an Ojai resident for four years, he feels that this past year has been marked by "a new understanding of Life, the interconnectedness of Things through a common essential nature." His intriguing oil painting *The 10,000 Things* is a vivid example of his beliefs.

Visitors to past OSA tours may wonder what's new for them this year. Ruth Farnham shares her thoughts about the evolution of her work: "This is one of the most exciting periods of my artistic life, this opening of doors into new experiences," she says. "Things that had become familiar to the point of non-existence suddenly take on an entirely new aspect. The new concepts inevitably led to new ways of expression and, frequently, the use of new materials."

These are just a few of the stimulating artists who will delight in chatting with visitors during the weekend of October 10-11 as they tour Ojai – alive with the spirit of art – and rich with its unique history as a mecca for artists of all persuasions.

Many of the Tour's 39 participating artists have achieved national recognition, and continue to evolve and respond to changing times. Ojai's artists display widely disparate styles, mediums and influences. Artworks on display at the studios include paintings, drawings, prints, sculpture, ceramics, jewelry, blown glass, photographs, assemblage and mixed media.

Visitors will enjoy the special beauty of the Ojai Valley and see, first-hand, the ambiance that brings so many creative people to the area. Pacing themselves along the back roads and byways on the self-guided tour, they can experience the area's tranquility and ever-changing colors, reflected in the art it inspires. Childress explains, "I love to look at the mountains polka-dotted with the scrub oaks and with the shadows cutting into and alongside the contours on the little hills below. Changing colors every hour."

Another OSA member describes the vital ambiance of Ojai, a town that nurtures the creative spirit. She says, "I love living where I can just walk over to my local coffee shop and sit down and know there's the screenwriter, there's the metal sculptor, there's the musician whose CD I had playing yesterday in the studio as I worked."

Fred Whitman, a sculptor and one of OSA's new members this year, says "The biggest impact that Ojai has on me, which helps me as an artist, is the peacefulness of the environment here. In order to give myself completely to my work I must be at peace with my surroundings. In Ojai, I am able to completely engulf myself in my work without distractions."

In addition to the tour, visitors will also enjoy the Saturday night reception, a fun event that takes place at the Ojai Center for the Arts at 113 S. Montgomery St. in downtown Ojai.

Surrounded by an exhibition of work by participating artists, they can mingle with OSA members and take part in both live and silent auctions. This is a great opportunity to acquire a piece of work at the source, made more meaningful by personal contact with the artist. Tickets to the Tour include admission to the reception.

Proceeds from the auctions benefit the Scholarship Fund. OSA is heavily involved with giving back to the community that nurtures them. At a time when arts funding is at a critical low, OSA presents scholarships to local art students to help with their continuing education. The funds come from Tour ticket sales, private donations and proceeds from auctions of member's artwork.

Including 2009, OSA will have given some \$150,000 in scholarships and donations to qualified art students, artists, and arts organizations in the Ojai Valley. They have purchased art books for local libraries, offered free workshops for children, supported public art projects and art outreach for people of all ages, and worked within the community to promote the visual arts.

Yes, art thrives in Ojai. In the words of Carlos Grasso, "Paintings are like good friends, always there when we need them, they inspire us, help us during difficult times, they speak to us without judgment, and most important of all, they remind us that we are alive by enhancing our present moment."

Tickets can now be purchased online, at a savings. Visit OSA's web site www.ojaistudioartists.org for advance tickets. Prices are \$31 in advance; \$36 on the weekend of the tour. Students (under 23, with student ID) are \$21; children 12 and under are free. Tickets can also be purchased or reserved at the Ojai Valley Chamber of Commerce: by phone, call (805) 646-8126, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; by mail, send to the Chamber at P.O. Box 1134, Ojai, CA 93024.

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