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# BMoA: You pick the art

Museum asks public to curate one of four new exhibitions

BY CAMILLE GAVIN  
Contributing writer

Normally the Bakersfield Museum of Art's 300-piece permanent collection is housed safely behind locked doors in a climate-controlled vault.

But starting this evening, 12 of these treasures will go on display, in addition to two major exhibits on loan from galleries in Carmel and San Francisco.

BMOA curator Vikki Cruz invited a dozen Kern County residents to pick their favorite artwork from the collection owned by the museum and also asked, "Why is art important to the community?"

Jason Sperber, with input from his 9-year-old daughter, Lucy, answered that question in their reason for choosing "Thai Jasmine Rice Under a Kern County Sky," a 48-by-48-inch enamel on board by Prapat Sirinavarat. The artist immigrated to this country from Asia some years ago and now lives in Bakersfield.

"To me, having this piece in the permanent collection and having it shown is a reminder that art is a way that we tell our stories," Sperber said. "And a community's art tells us who we are, where we came from and where we are going."

The painting is both surreal and realistic — in the lower foreground are distinct images of temples and elephants (a symbolic animal Sirinavarat includes in all his paintings) and most of the upper half shows a blurred but very large bear-like animal looking as if it's on the prowl.

Don Le was candid about why he selected "Keeping the Solemn Vigil," an oil painting by John Van Dreal.

"It was a gut response," Le said. "The two women are staring out but you don't know at what — there's no context and it aroused my curiosity."

One of the women appears to be naked under a striped beach towel she holds against one bare shoulder; the other woman holds a black mask over her eyes.

Frank Sullivan's selection is called "The Falls," by Aron Wiesenfeld, which appealed to him because it's dramatic. It shows a slender young woman clinging to the sold rock face of a waterfall.

"The first time I saw it was in



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Don Le answered the call for community curators put out by the Bakersfield Museum of Art. Le selected this 1995 oil on canvas, titled "Keeping the Solemn Vigil," by artist John Van Dreal. Le and 11 others selected the works from BMOA's permanent collection.

## BMoA fall exhibition

**Opening reception:** 6-8 p.m. today

**Where:** Bakersfield Museum of Art, 1930 R St.

**Admission:** \$10, free to members

**Information:** 323-7219

Vikki's office," he said. "It's very engaging and there are two ways to look at it — she's either worried or serene; she's scaling this cascade and looking directly at you with this vague expression."

Kamal Youssef's "Vigil," was Chanell Hunt's choice. The surreal oil painting depicts a woman reclining next to a tree trunk with an owl perched on one of its bare branches, while a sun-like orb ringed in shadow emerges from a red-tinted sky.

Hunt chose it because, "The lucid and unapologetic use of color and lines reminded me of the freedom of art, the pure expression and expansion of our perception through art."

Other collections in the Fall Exhibition include the Photography of Mexico, an exhibit organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. It provides an

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# Her career path just clicked

Photographer follows in dad's footsteps

BY MATT MUNOZ  
Contributing writer

If her parents had had their way, Yvonne Venegas would have pursued a career in music, the same path taken by her twin sister, Mexican pop star Julieta Venegas.

But it was photography, her father's passion and profession, that beguiled Venegas, who was drawn to the powerful imagery of her hometown of Tijuana, Mexico, a city of 1.5 million, where life is a perpetual balancing act of work, family, art and late-night debauchery.

"I come from a background of social photography. My father is a wedding photographer and a studio photographer, and his work tends to look at his customers," said Venegas during a phone interview from her home in Mexico City. "That's what I'm looking at, but I try to sort of change the view and interpret from my own experiences with



PHOTO BY YVONNE VENEGAS

"Nirvana" from the series "Maria Elvia Hank," 2006, by Yvonne Venegas. The photo is on loan to the Bakersfield Museum of Art from the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

these people."

She and her siblings were encouraged from a young age to pursue artistic endeavors, but Venegas' journey was filled with

detours, nothing like her twin's singleminded game plan.

"My father tried to involve me in music, but it was really kind of

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# Teachers gift students, families with picnic

BY KELLY ARDIS

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Vacation is over and homework has begun, but local students have one more shot to get their ya-yas out in the waning days of summer, courtesy of an unlikely source: their teachers.

Saturday's second annual Bakersfield Family Picnic, put on by the Bakersfield Elementary Teachers Association, is a chance to have fun and make connections, said BETA president Michelle Johnson. Students from any local school, in the Bakersfield City School District or not, are welcome to attend with their families.

"The picnic is all about welcoming all the families and students back to school,"

## Second annual Bakersfield Family Picnic presented by Bakersfield Elementary Teachers Association

**When:** 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday

**Where:** Central Park at Mill Creek, between 21st and 19th Streets, just east of R Street.

**Admission:** Free, open to the community

said Johnson, who leads the union that represents the district's certified staff. "It's an opportunity to have some good quality family time in the sun, having fun and not

having to worry about all the costs (of taking family somewhere fun)."

Kids can look forward to games, music and bounce houses. Community organizations such as Children First Campaign and Stay Focused Ministries will set up booths and have activities for children. Families can bring a picnic lunch if they want, but BETA will give away 1,000 hot dogs, chips and drinks at its booth.

The goal of the event is to let local families get to know each other and area teachers.

"We want to show (parents and students) that the educators really love their children and care about them and want them to be successful," Johnson said. "We want them to see us not only in the class-

room, but outside of the classroom, too."

Around 900 people attended the first Bakersfield Family Picnic last year. The event was created because BETA's outreach committee wanted an event early in the school year. The group's biggest event is Read Across Bakersfield each March.

If there seems to be a catch for the free event, Johnson said there's not. Unlike other "free" events where attendees might have to pay for individual activities, she said, the picnic is really, truly free.

"It's just a good old-fashioned picnic," she said. "There's no ulterior goal. We're not raising money, we're not giving money away. We're just bringing the community closer together and building the school family."

## An inspiring ode to art

Longtime Bakersfield religious educator Deborah Mish Garton, who died



Garton

Aug. 20, was one of the community members selected by the Bakersfield Museum of Art in July to curate an exhibition that features BMOA's permanent artworks. She selected "Intermezzo," a 1968 serigraph by Phil Paradise.

Garton and the 11 other community curators were selected for the honor after answering the question "Why is art important to the community?"

### Garton's response:

Bakersfield loves art.

More than we realize.

On the walls of our homes, on the corners of our streets.

All around us, even in us, is beautiful, inventive, thought provoking art.

Community pride is always in its art. Our city would have less character if we didn't have Fr. Garces at the circle, Much less the big shoe on Chester Ave.

Music, from honky tonk, to country, to jazz, to rock fill our businesses.

Us peeps r tly uncrntn abt art. But, art is rl.

(Usually people are totally uncertain about art. But art is real life.)

Nothing can describe the rush of connecting with a photograph in the Californian, or

Increasingly becoming aware of all the art around you.

The trick to enjoying art is to enjoy the real life behind it.

Year after year, life after life, art connects us to all humanity.

An art lover in Bakersfield has a wealth of life to become immersed in.

Rarely, is art unable to penetrate your work, home, community, or heart.

That's why art is important to the city of Bakersfield.

## VENEGAS

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nightmarish. My mom wanted to have the twins in piano classes together and I would show up to class completely asleep. My sister would be all nerdy and all disciplined about it."

Venegas developed her skills at the drawing table and then turned to photography, creating a series of critically acclaimed photographs, including several featured in a Bakersfield Museum of Art exhibition — "Photography in Mexico from the Collection of SFMOMA" — which opens today.



Venegas

"It's wonderful and an honor to be included in the show and among so many great photographers. To be traveling with it is just wonderful. My work has a tendency to be not so well understood."

The subject of her works in the exhibition: the secret lives of Mexico's upper middle class.

Venegas offers a rare and candid glimpse into a class of people who rigorously safeguard their privacy because flaunting wealth in Mexico can be dangerous.

"I have a very strong attraction to the upper class. For me, what it is, is that my work is kind of focused on very isolated groups and very isolated creations that have to do with the concept of class, but it also talks about, in the bigger term, looking from the outside at social imbalance. In our country there is 60 percent poverty, and wealth is held up in a very small group."

In 2006, Venegas was granted private access to the family compound of Mexican politician María Elvia de Hank, a member of the ruling PRI party, who died in 2012. Hank had a longstanding professional relationship with Venegas' father, Jose Luis Venegas, who first photographed her when she was a 15-year-old debutante in Tijuana.

"My dad started a studio in Tijuana in the '70s and Maria Elvia was a young, beautiful, debutante queen. She had great respect and love for my father,

and that's one of the things that helped get me access to her."

Venegas would photograph the wealthy politician over four years after eventually winning Hank's trust. The politician was sensitive to the backlash she risked by allowing such a candid look into her life — opulent by the standards of most of her countrymen.

But it was the wedding of Hank's daughter that sparked the professional relationship. Hank asked Venegas and her father to shoot the wedding and festivities surrounding the ceremony. But even after Venegas won the trust of the politician, she never was granted complete artistic freedom.

"So, it was four years of coming in and out of their space, and I was carefully watched about what I was photographing."

While she was involved in the project, Venegas brought the images across the border and to the campus of UC San Diego, where she was pursuing a master's degree.

"I needed a thesis project and this would be something I could go photograph and then go to where all these artists are to talk

about it. It was the perfect moment for me to kind of keep it leveled, because, to me, it would be hard for me to be immersed in that photography and not have anybody to talk about it."

While the SFMOMA exhibition contains only a fraction of the completed project, Venegas said the experience opened her eyes to the country's ever-changing social dynamics.

"This ideal of perfection, something that I consider is common of our social constructions, I try to throw it off a bit and find imbalance and find moments that have to do with absurdity and have to do with the imperfect. You tend to see a lot of that."

"What I'm attracted to from this class is that it's also in the making. There is such a small amount of privileged people, yet there is such a large aspirational class. The history of wealth in Mexico is not very long and I like to find the things that show that it is in the making and it is imperfect and under construction."

— Matt Munoz is marketing director at the Bakersfield Museum of Art.

## BMOA

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overview of the country's history, from the time of the Mexican Revolution, 1910-20, up to urban politics of the 1970s and '80s. A large collection with many pieces, it is being shown in the museum's Dezember and Cunningham galleries.

In the Ablin Wing is an intriguing exhibit of portraiture, titled "Face to Face," that is being shown through the courtesy of Chris Winfield and the Winfield Gallery in Carmel.

The work of 17 different using an array of mediums —

paint, graphite and conte crayon — some of the portraits are full face, others depict the subject's full or partial body and each one draws the eye of the viewer.

Some appear to be challenging the viewer, or maybe the artist; some appear to be restful; and some show curiosity on the part of the subject, as if to say, "Why are you drawing me?" or "Why are you invading my privacy?"

All three parts of the exhibition will be up through Jan. 4. The museum's regular hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Friday, and noon to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.



CASEY CHRISTIE / THE CALIFORNIAN

"Face to Face: 30 Years of Portraiture: is part of the fall exhibitions opening tonight at the Bakersfield Museum of Art.