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Kick off 2020 with art downtown

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This work is by Laura Lee Best, who will be the featured artist for a show at Dagny's Coffee Co. in January. Courtesy of Bakersfield Art Association

The new year can mark a series of firsts and, for artist Laura Lee Best, that starts Friday with her first solo show. Best's work will be on display in "Expressions" at Dagny's Coffee Co. as part of First Friday.

Although her love of art began at a young age, Best said she is fairly new to displaying her work to the public. She's had a piece featured in the Visual Arts Festival at the Bakersfield Museum of Art, participated in this October's Via Arte Street Painting Festival, re-creating her piece "Happy," and

she displays at the Bakersfield Art Association Art Center, where she also teaches weekly classes.

She said she gathers inspiration from a variety of places and things: "mountains, seascapes, florals, animals, portraits, and especially my children. Whatever moves me at the time when I create."

"Expressions" aims to capture the emotions of people, and translate them into the "form" of a facial expression, she said.

The series of 13 works began with the piece "Untitled," depicting a woman with headphones over her ears, her eyes closed, who appears to be yelling.

"I was feeling anxious about a lot of different things happening in my life and I wanted to draw a face that portrayed how I was feeling on the inside," she wrote in an email. "I was pleased by the outcome, so it led to my second work, 'Happy,' and the series continued to evolve from there."

Depicting strong emotions in the portraits, Best said the theme of the series is about "letting go of the worries of what people will think of my art, of me, and willing to be vulnerable."

She wrote, "I would like people to see that 'Expressions' is about celebrating people — being shameless of our outward differences, and sharing that which we have in common, the beauty of our inward humanity."

A reception will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. Friday at the coffeehouse, 1600 20th St.

For more information on Best, visit her website, LauraLeeStudio.com, or on Instagram at [instagram.com/LauraLeeArtStudio](https://www.instagram.com/LauraLeeArtStudio).

'Winter' show

Also on display for First Friday is "The Color of Winter," a group art exhibit at the Bakersfield Art Association Art Center.

This collection of 11 works varies in mediums including watercolor, acrylic, pastels, oil and digital.

Artists featured in the show are Toni Lott, Norma Eaton, Cheri Sperl, John Oxford, Iva Fendrick, Susan McQuerry, Joyce Umfress and Mark Engeliem.

The opening reception with refreshments will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Art Center, 1607 19th St. The exhibit will remain up through the month.

Bakersfield Museum of Art

Time is running out to view the current exhibitions at the Bakersfield Museum of Art. Luckily, the museum offers free admission and extended hours every first Friday.

Photographer Noé Montes' work is on display in "Cuyama." The series documents the Cuyama Valley, a city 60 miles southwest of Bakersfield, through its unique people, environment and culture.

Over the last 25 years, Montes has focused on documentary work around a specific social issue or geographic location. He then connects with local partners for community and civic engagement. For "Cuyama," he teamed with the Blue Sky Center, which works within the Cuyama community on economic development projects.

For its exhibit "Bakersfield Built: Architecture of the 1960s," the museum collaborated with the Kern County Museum, Cal State Bakersfield and the Society of Architectural Historians/Southern California Chapter.

This collection features blueprints, photographs, renderings and furniture highlighting the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, who designed the Ablin Residence in town, as well as a number of Bakersfield-born architects who came to prominence in the late 1950s and early '60s.

And Natalie Arnoldi combined two of her passions — marine biology and art — for "Of the Sea."

Her seven large-scale oil works present an environmental narrative utilizing different methods of painting. Of note is the bold "Gigi," depicting a great white shark in a life-size painting measuring 8.5 feet by 24 feet.

"Cuyama" closes on Saturday while "Bakersfield Built" and "Of the Sea" will remain on display until Jan. 11. But Friday is the last chance for the public to see all three for free. The museum, 1930 R St., will be open from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

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