

Summer 2022

ARTS/99

The publication of Arts and Culture El Dorado

Compass: *A device that shows the cardinal directions used for navigation and geographic orientation*



THIS ISSUE

Dear Reader,

Arts 99 takes its name from Highway 50, which runs east and west through El Dorado County, and Highway 49, which runs north and south. The two roads share a fleeting embrace in Placerville, where they momentarily make a sum of 99. The name, then, might suggest that Placerville is the final destination for this publication, the place to which all roads lead—but all roads run in two directions. With this in mind, we invite you to go road tripping with us down the cultural highways of our scenic county. The Summer issue of *Arts 99* will be our vehicle for this sightseeing excursion; Highways 49 and 50 will be the axes of the compass that guides us as we travel North, East, South, and West, circumnavigating El Dorado County's artistic and cultural geography.

We begin our trip in Georgetown, where Maker Spaces allow local students use their creativity and follow their imagination. Our next stop is South Lake Tahoe, where the newly established Arts, Culture, and Tourism Commission seeks to make Tahoe's arts and culture as vibrant as its outdoor attractions. Then we sojourn in Somerset, where Fernando Reyes produces beautiful art to match his breathtaking surroundings. Finally, we conclude our trip in Cameron Park, where The Stage at Burke Junction brings professional theatre to the local community.

We hope that our tour of the corners of the county, like any summer vacation, is enjoyable, but we also hope that it orients you—or reorients you, as the case may be—within our county and around its richly variegated cultural and artistic offerings.

Thank you for your support.



ARTS/99

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NORTH: MAKING SPACE FOR MAKER SPACES

Photo courtesy of Liz Dowell

Liz Dowell, a Georgetown local, is making space for Maker Spaces in Georgetown schools. Maker Spaces are areas dedicated to exploration, artistic creation, and practical, hands-on learning. In the Black Oak Mine Unified School District, these spaces, managed by Liz and other teachers, are packed to the brim with a vast, eclectic panoply of materials, donated and purchased, that range from professional-grade paints to Mexican beads to popsicle sticks and fuzzy pipe cleaners. On “Fun Fridays”, students flock to the repurposed classrooms in which the Maker Spaces are housed, eager to learn by doing.



Photo courtesy of Liz Dowell

Liz was steeped in a Maker mindset from a young age. Her father, a painter who has shown work professionally, was an arts instructor for over 25 years, and he encouraged Liz to work creatively with her hands as soon as she was able—even if that entailed a certain amount of risk. “He has a story where I was very small, and he was using a rotary saw,” she recounts. “I said I wanted to try it, and he said, ‘If you can pick it up, I’ll show you how to use it.’” Liz’s innate curiosity, and the passion for teaching she inherited from her father, propelled her into a life organized largely around service to children—first her own, then the children of the Georgetown Divide. Eventually she discovered the Maker Movement: a name for what she already practiced, and a philosophical framework to impart to others.

With the cooperation of teachers and administrators in the Black Oak Mine Unified School District, Liz has established two Maker Spaces, one at Northside STEAM School, the other at the Georgetown Innovation Lab. These spaces serve children in Kindergarten through 6th Grade. Liz, whose unmitigated enthusiasm for her work is not just apparent but palpable, endeavors to instill that same unselfconscious, uninhibited excitement for creative exploration in the students she works with. Younger students make collages, jewelry, paintings and drawings, dollhouses with dolls to match, and much more. “The kids will make these beautiful, elaborate things, and then they’ll just give them to me.

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EAST: Taking Action for the Arts

South Lake Tahoe is known primarily for its natural wonders and outdoor recreation, attracting tourists from all over the world year-round. But there is another, often overlooked, resource in South Lake Tahoe: its human, artistic, and cultural capital. With the recent creation of the Arts, Culture, and Tourism Commission—an official advisory body to the City and unofficial ombudsman for arts and culture in the region—the City of South Lake Tahoe has placed a new emphasis on this underutilized resource, waging that visitors and locals alike will eventually find the creative energy of South Lake Tahoe as stimulating as the natural wonders that surround it.

The City Council and City Manager Joe Irvin are

eager to support the cultural ecosystem of South Lake Tahoe and saw an opportunity in recently awarded funds from the American Rescue Plan Act: funding a cultural commission empowered to act as the interface between the City and the arts community.

The timing of this decision coincided with a rising tide of civic engagement among local artists, many of whom were galvanized by City policies such as prohibitive permitting fees that discouraged public art. Eleanor BonBon Brennan, who was eventually appointed Commission Chair, was at the vanguard of a group of arts activists. “The ACT Commission was a response from the City to a contemporary resurgence of the arts in South Tahoe,” says Bryan

Yerian, Vice Chair of the Commission. “There is a collective voice rising up in South Tahoe. We’re like a boiling pot with a lid on top, and the ACT Commission is the handle for us to open that lid.”

The ACT Commission is currently developing a Mission Statement, which will outline the commitment to accessibility, inclusivity, equity, fair wage consciousness, and the ethos of creative placemaking. They are also working on several

action items: Creating a public arts master plan, revamping the city’s Public Art Request for Proposals system, and streamlining the City Planning Department processes. Their hope is that a recalibration of City public art policies



will not only invigorate South Tahoe but also slow the cultural “brain drain” that impacts all rural communities. With a thriving arts ecosystem and ample opportunities for creative achievement, the ACT Commission believes it can motivate a generation of young homegrown artists to practice their craft locally, rather than taking their talents to Los Angeles, San Francisco, or New York.

Of particular importance to Eleanor and Bryan is the sustainability of the Commission. “We want to build a foundation that guides the future of this Commission for the long haul,” Eleanor says. “We want to make sure that this is not a temporary blip. We don’t want to have the ARPA funding come into hand, spend it, and then dissolve.” Integral

to the future-proofing of the ACT Commission is the development of strong relationships and collaborative partnerships in South Tahoe and El Dorado County. “Our City Council is very supportive of the arts and they let it be known. Arts are on their agenda,” Eleanor affirms. Arts and Culture El Dorado will be another key partner; Executive Director Terry LeMoncheck recently presented a roadmap for future cooperation to the Commission. “The Commission is extraordinarily receptive to new concepts and opportunities,” says LeMoncheck. “Eleanor and I have already set up a monthly phone call and we have some very promising ideas in the hopper.”

Philosophically, the Commission sees itself as a way for South Lake Tahoe to define its own cultural

identity. By breaking down barriers to the creation of public art and encouraging lively cultural activities, the Commission hopes to make Tahoe’s authentic, colorful spirit outwardly visible. In a sense, they want to give Tahoe the chance to express itself. “We want people’s image of Tahoe to be more than the lake silhouette,” Bryan laughs. For the City of South Lake Tahoe, a community that thrives on tourism, the benefits of a more vibrant arts scene will be far-reaching. “We want to make sure that the art that is put out into the public sphere has a high level of integrity and excellence, so that we can take pride in that product,” Bryan explains. “Artists will make life more colorful for locals, but they will also bring in people from outside. Above all, we want to enhance the Tahoe experience.”



From left to right:

- Stacey Ballard, a lifelong artist, teacher, and volunteer in the South Lake Tahoe community
- Bryan Yerian, a mixed media artist and fulltime professor at Lake Tahoe Community College
- Eleanor “BonBon” Brennan, a small-business owner and tattoo artist
- Scott Forrest, a painter and dedicated arts advocate

Not pictured:

- David Hamilton, a longtime actor, director, and educator
- Tourism advisor Tony Lyle, who has served as Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority V.P. of Tourism

SOUTH: A STUDIO IN SOMERSET



Photo courtesy of Fernando Reyes

The life of Fernando Reyes, a Somerset- and Oakland-based artist, has been a tale of two careers. Originally from the Central Valley, Fernando spent the first 17 years of his working life at Bank of America, first in Fresno, then in San Francisco. In 1991, after he had worked his way up to an executive position, he decided to quit his job to pursue a career as a professional artist, a dream he had nurtured since childhood. He began taking art classes at City College of San Francisco before moving to Chicago, where he received a BFA from the Art Institute of Chicago. After he graduated, Fernando and his husband, Daniel Jackson, lived briefly in Davis before moving to Oakland, where Fernando has maintained a studio in the Jingletown neighborhood since 1999. In 2018, they bought a house in Somerset, where they now live full time.

Although he had long enjoyed success as a professional artist, Fernando's career reached new heights in 2018 when he landed a show at The Mexican Museum in San Francisco. The exhibition was a comprehensive retrospective of his career—the kind of show most artists only dream of. “It went as far back as my drawings from childhood,” Fernando says. “There were three large rooms in the museum, and I filled up the entire museum with work. It was an incredible show, and it was probably the reason that my career took off... It was probably one of the best things to ever happen to me.”

One remarkable aspect of Fernando's career is the incredible diversity of his oeuvre, which ranges from sculpture to printmaking to painting. “I tend to get bored if I do the same thing over and over again. For some artists that works well, but for me it

doesn't,” he says. Fernando began his career with a strong emphasis on the human form, painting nudes in bold colors and in a contemporary mode. But when he moved back to California from Chicago, his work entered a new phase. “In Davis I didn't have access to models, but I did have access to beautiful landscapes,” Fernando recalls. “I would go out and do plein air painting, which was new to me at that point.” Although his pivot from nudes to landscapes was essentially a creative expedience, the landscapes proved to be more marketable than his depictions of the human form, as some collectors are more likely to display a landscape than a nude in their home.



Manzanita Magnificent, 2020, oil on canvas

After moving to Oakland, his work evolved once again. Inspired by Matisse's Cut-Outs, Fernando began experimenting with printed materials; his new technique bore its first fruit in the form of a triptych paying homage to Matisse's Blue Nudes series. But that was only the beginning: "I was cutting up all of this paper to make the cut-outs, and I had a lot of remnants," Fernando explains. "I noticed that some of them were very interesting shapes... I never considered myself to be an abstract artist at all, but when I started playing around with these odd shapes, I found that I was creating really interesting, dynamic compositions, unlike anything I'd done in my entire career." Similar to his landscapes, which were a happy accident of time and place, his abstract art, created literally from leftovers, from the debris and detritus of the creative process, proved to be extremely popular, propelling his work into trendy mid-century modern homes and prestigious venues like The Mexican Museum (although his work can be found in homes of all periods).

In 2021, less than two years after Fernando and Daniel began living full time in Somerset, the Caldor Fire devoured nearby communities and cast a smoky pall over their lovingly maintained ten-acre property. They were forced to evacuate for two weeks; ultimately, the dozer lines came a mere mile and a half from the property that Fernando, in happier times, refers to as "our quiet

oasis". Partnering with Amador County's 3 Fish Studios, Fernando and four other artists undertook a fundraising effort for victims of the Caldor Fire. In just four days, they raised close to \$40,000. Fernando's contribution to the fundraiser, *Manzanita Magnificent*, a painting inspired by the trees on his property, netted \$9,400 for the cause.

On his Somerset property, Fernando has an art studio where he creates new work. He and Daniel spend their free time enjoying the outdoors and going wine-tasting; they are members of seven wineries in the Fair Play and Amador wine regions. Inspired by the natural beauty of the Sierra Nevada foothills, Fernando has begun to revisit landscape painting: "I want to create a body of work based on the hikes that I have gone on with my dogs. You're walking these country roads, and depending on the time of day, the light can just be so gorgeous and so inspiring." Fernando is looking forward to something like retirement. "I want to slow down," he says. "I'll still do art, but I'm very happy with how things have gone in my career. All I've ever wanted is to create art and be comfortable, and I think that's where I'm at now." When asked where he sees himself in five years, he smiles, shakes his head, and answers a different question: "If you asked me 20 years ago where I wanted to be in 20 years, I think I'd say I want a place in the foothills, with a studio and a beautiful view."

You can contact Fernando, view more of his work, or find information about future exhibitions by visiting freyesart.com.

Photo courtesy of Fernando Reyes





The Stage's production of "Emilie La Marquise Du Chaelet Defends Her Life Tonight." Photo courtesy of The Stage

The Stage at Burke Junction, a Cameron Park-based non-profit, is bringing professional theatre to El Dorado County audiences. Located in Cameron Park's Burke Junction Shopping Center, the "storefront theater" acts as a purveyor of the performing arts, offering the community a product very different from those of the businesses that surround it. Bill Glasser, Executive Director of The Stage at Burke Junction, was inspired to create the theater after meeting Co-Founder Harvey Jordan during a CapStage production of "August: Osage County", in which they both acted. Harvey Jordan managed several storefront theaters, and Bill Glasser—who owns the Burke Junction Shopping Center—had access to a recently vacated storefront that had been previously used as a Karate studio. Harvey Jordan designed the theater and went on to produce and direct its inaugural show: Tennessee William's "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof".

But almost as soon as the curtain had raised on the Stage at Burke Junction's first act, the Covid-19 pandemic sent the curtain crashing back down, forcing the theater to take an unwanted intermission. Bill Glasser regarded the timing of the pandemic as "catastrophic", but he made the best of the shutdown, using the time off as an opportunity to install new lighting, rearrange the theater's seating, and officially secure a 501c3 non-profit status for the Stage, as well as a beer and wine license. The Stage has now reopened for its 2022 season.

Bill, a lifelong actor raised by a mother who was an actress and a

father who was a producer and director for film and television, sees theatre as unique among the arts, distinguished especially by its ephemerality and intensity. "Theatre is like a flower," he says. "It blossoms and then it disappears, and all you're left with are the memories and the



DJ Lacy and Jazs Sunpanich as Will and Michele in "Love & Baseball." Photo courtesy of The Stage.

reverberations of that experience.” The intimate dimensions of the Stage at Burke Junction serve to enhance the special immediacy of the theatre experience: “It’s a 51-seat house with a proscenium thrust, so the audience surrounds the stage on three sides. For an audience to be that close to the actors is a gift. You can see a thought cross their face, or an emotion come up through their throat.” To illustrate the point, he recalls the time an older man—who had no prior exposure to professional theatre—attended their production of “Cat on a Hot Tin Roof”, an emotionally grueling portrayal of a family in crisis. “He became terribly embarrassed to be watching a family argue right in front of him,” Bill recounts. “It was a shockingly visceral experience for him. I don’t know if he’ll ever be back, but he’ll certainly never forget it.”

As a non-profit, the Stage at Burke Junction seeks to enrich its community by providing opportunities to artists and audiences alike. El Dorado County, like many rural communities, suffers from a dearth of high-quality venues for professional-grade performing arts. By providing such a venue, the Stage hopes to “give performers and audiences unique cultural experiences that they wouldn’t otherwise have, at a good price, in a local spot.” For artists, Bill wants to provide a truly professional experience, which means, among other things, paying them. “I’m very adamant about everyone getting paid,” he says. “We don’t assume that this work is free, cheap, or easy. Even if it’s not a lot, getting paid means you can call yourself a professional.” For audiences, Bill wants the Stage to serve as the kind of cultural amenity more commonly found in metropolitan

areas, exposing locals to powerful, intellectually stimulating performances that broaden their cultural horizons and enrich their life. So far, Bill thinks they’ve been successful: “When the lights come on, sometimes the audience has to just sit there. It’s like coming up from the bottom of the ocean; you have to come up slowly so you don’t get the bends... We’ve been getting great feedback. A lot of our audience members are repeat customers.”

Looking to the future, Bill sees the Stage as a way to alter the creative landscape of the county. “We’re creating a ton of theatre infrastructure. For a long time, this area has been a farm team for theatre. A lot of kids go on to Broadway, or to make movies, or to be producers... For me, I want the Stage to be a place where some of this talent can act professionally and refine their chops.” He also hopes that the Stage will ignite dialogue in the community and spur artists and arts organizations across the county to collaborate more deeply. “People in this county live in silos and often don’t talk to each other. I want us to be a conduit for conversation,” he says. In the meantime, the Stage will continue to put great theatre—“as close as you can get to anything you see in San Francisco or New York”—on stage for El Dorado County audiences to enjoy.

Visit stageatburke.com to buy tickets, view the schedule for the 2022 season, or learn more about the theater.



Photo courtesy of The Stage

Like, ‘Here, this is for you!’ It’s the act of making that’s important to them,” Liz marvels. Some of the older students try their hands in more advanced fields such as aeronautical engineering, constructing increasingly flightworthy paper airplanes. They explore the finer points of aerodynamics by experimenting with the weight and thickness of the paper. Liz doesn’t mind picking up their discarded prototypes. “When they’re all done, I spend about an hour and a half cleaning up, because it’s just not conducive to their creativity for them to focus on cleaning while they’re there.”

Liz finds it especially gratifying when students ask if they can come back “tomorrow”—tomorrow, of course, being a Saturday. “Art takes a child to a different place than the classroom,” Liz explains. In contrast to more structured school environments, in which constraints and expectations are often placed on students, Maker Spaces are fields for the imagination to frolic, a site of unrestrained creative activity where trial and error are encouraged. “I’m not the ‘no’ person,” she laughs. “It’s important to me to let kids create without interference... I want to give kids the ability to create stuff whenever and however they want to.”

For Black Oak Mine students, their “Fun Fridays” may resemble play, but they also yield serious educational and emotional benefits. Liz professes not to be an expert in art therapy, but the benefits

of artistic creation for children—and, for that matter, adults—are well established. More concretely, Liz has received laudatory feedback from Wendy Westsmith, Director of the Georgetown School of Innovation, as well as from parents who have noticed positive changes in their children since they began to, in Liz’s words, “make stuff”. The benefits, Liz says, are especially noticeable for children with behavioral issues, who tend to flourish in the Maker Spaces.

For Liz, there is only one thing more rewarding than a child discovering an unknown talent or a latent passion: her own discovery of new materials in the Maker Space donation box. “It’s like Christmas for me. I always think, ‘oh, so and so will love this!’” With the support of the Georgetown Divide community and the Black Oak Mine Unified School District, Liz plans to continue enriching the lives of local children—not by making them learn, but by letting them learn by making.

Georgetown Divide residents can donate arts and crafts supplies to the GT School of Innovation. Donations can be dropped off in the bin in the Science Garden located off B Street by the school office.

For more info contact lizldowell@bomusd.org



Photo courtesy of Liz Dowell

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Arts and Culture El Dorado's mission to promote, connect, and empower arts and culture throughout the county is achieved by targeted programs and services, a vibrant gallery exhibition series, and a focus on initiatives which support and sustain the cultural life of the region.