



## Capital City Arts Initiative

The Capital City Arts Initiative [CCAI] is delighted to present, *Wish You Were Here*, an exhibition by artist Susanne Forestieri, at the CCAI Courthouse Gallery from October 6, 2017 – January 18, 2018. CCAI extends its sincere appreciations to the artist, the Carson City Courthouse, and to all those involved with the exhibition. In addition, CCAI thanks our commissioned writer, Kristen Peterson, who provided the following essay.

### Light and Shadows - a Las Vegas Palette

When Susanne Forestieri was beginning her art career in the late 1960s and early '70s, pop art had influenced a new generation of artists. Also, hard-edged minimalism and pure abstraction were championed; conceptual art and its rejection of more traditional art forms became a significant part of discourse; and land artists were forging ahead with earth as medium.

But Forestieri, a young art student from Upper Manhattan, trained and skilled in classical drawing, turned to painting and remained loyal to impressionist and modernist styles even when moving into more contemporary realms over the years.

At 72, painting has been her lifelong study and pursuit. She is a colorist applying layers of color to create depth and form, often working with an impressionist's stroke and a loyalty to emotion, and, most notably, the understanding of light and its relationship to form. In recent years, she turned to abstraction and her oeuvre broadened to include works of rich, lush strokes from a palette knife that conversed with her classical tastes, sometimes within the same painting.

But Forestieri's paintings are so much more than an echo of early-to-mid 20th Century art. *Wish You Were Here* presents a small survey of the breadth of one remarkable painter, whose life has been in constant conversation with oils, a relationship that has spanned decades and continues to challenge the artist in her pursuit of truth and beauty in both contemporary and traditional painting.

Her defining characteristic as an artist has been her respect for light and shadow, a trait that stems from her training at the Arts Students League of New York where natural lighting illuminated the studio (morning to night) from the skylights above. If the windows were dirty, all the better for filtered rays diffusing the light.

Light creates comfort and intimacy in a small painting of her sister who sits on a floral couch, talking on the phone in the sunlight of her living room. It is a slice of someone's daily life from the vantage point of a familial gaze, bringing the viewer into the private moment, much like that in the painting of a young man reading to his grandmother. Paintings with subjects that are personal to her carry a universal understanding of life, family and time.

Light creates mood and lends to narrative in "Adjustment," a painting of a woman dressing with a young boy (possibly a family member) nearby. It is another ordinary and private moment. A minimalist abstract background compliments the tone. Other works, such as "Bordeaux," a post-impressionist painting of a farm house on one half of the work, with an abstract impression on the other half reflecting the same scene.



"Bordeaux", oil on canvas, 24"x32", 2014

Forestieri's palette knife paintings began while the artist was living in New Mexico where she had temporarily moved seven years ago. While there, she painted nonstop, experimenting with process and "the soothing act of moving the palette knife around, thinking in broad strokes, rather than detail." Her visual references, once live models, then old photographs she had taken, were replaced by memory and intuition, resulting in works such as the oil-on-wood painting, "A Nursery Tale."

"Pale Fire," a large oil on canvas, began when she first moved to Las Vegas from New York City 30 years ago and noticed the brightly lit wall set against the dark blue sky outside of her window. Not feeling content with her effort to capture the moment, she'd set it aside for 20 years. It was her experimentation with abstract painting in New Mexico that brought new life to the work, in which she focusses on the two areas of color. The rare use of blues for this artist became a "nighttime seascape" with the moon obscured by a dust storm.

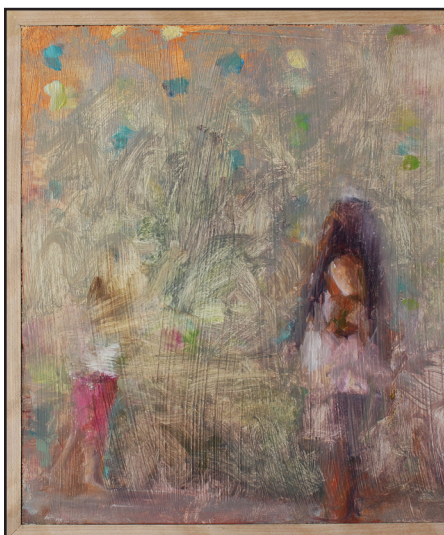
The daytime light of the Southwest lives in more recent semi-abstract works of southern Nevada landscapes and rock formations that are depicted in her textured and dramatic compositions. Layered hues create depths in her portraiture, and her ballet dancers evoke as much impressionism as do her paintings of toreadors and dancers in motion.

Childhood, a recurring theme, represents the loss of youth and time, a "fantasy that gets knocked out of you." Years after photographing her daughter playing dress up in fantastic colorful costumes, new paintings of the scenes would emerge, at times as abstract marks on hazy backgrounds, capturing the sentiment of innocence.

In Las Vegas, her imprint is widespread with her works featured in gallery exhibits and public commissions over the years. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, followed by a Master of Fine Arts and a Master of Arts degree in Education from the same institution. She was an original member of the legendary non-profit Contemporary Arts Collective (now Contemporary Arts Center) established by artists, UNLV professors and students in 1989.



"Pale Fire", oil on canvas, 30"x40", 2011



"Birthday Party 1", oil on canvas, 12"x12", 2016

Her paintings sit in private collections, personal and corporate. In 2002, she was awarded for Achievement in the Arts by the Clark County Library District. The next year a retrospective of her work was featured at the Las Vegas Art Museum. Over time, Forestieri continued with her evolving style in oil and nod to art history while performance art, digital works, conceptual installations, street art, and cutting-edge contemporary works became more of the norm in the Las Vegas gallery scene. In 2011, she opened a cooperative gallery and working studio in the Arts Factory. The artist continues to teach in schools and give private lessons in her home studio using live models.

The technique and discipline that have defined her work brought national recognition with a 1996 National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in painting. Her figurative works have been shown at the National Academy Museum, the American Museum of Illustration in New York City, and reproduced in the Society of Illustrators' 28th annual issue.

In Las Vegas, she lives with a vast collection of her work in her downtown home. Decades of work in oil, charcoal, and pastel reflect a resounding diversity even within a dedication to a specific style. A spacious studio, adjacent to the living room and aglow with natural light that passes through the sliding glass door and floor-to-ceiling windows, is reminiscent of the natural light of her early training so many years ago. It is because of her dedication to light and form that depth extends beyond subject matter and into the spaces in between spaces. Flatness is something she's always avoided.

Her more contemporary approaches include works, such as "Lift- Off," in which quadrants reflecting images that fascinate her —explosions, food, dark smoky rooms and stage lights — with the aim of presenting a sense of excitement and danger. "Adman" is a deconstruction of advertising and male models. "Square", a 12-by-12-inch painting, is a nod to modernism.



"Lift-Off", oil on canvas, 42"x36", 2014

"There are always these turning points because you get stale," Forestieri says of her relationship with painting. "You have to find another way to say what you want to say, another part of yourself you haven't explored." She has done this by testing and retesting, studying and learning over decades dating back to when she began as an artist.

"The biggest surprise to me is that making really good art doesn't get any easier with time and age," she says. "Each work is a struggle to bring to life, some more than others. People ask, 'How long does a painting take?' "Pointing to "Pale Fire," named for her favorite Nabokov book that contains a passage from Shakespeare (*The moon's an arrant thief, / And her pale fire she snatches from the sun*), she adds, "This one I've been working on for 30 years."

Kristen Peterson  
Las Vegas, Nevada  
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