

Topanga Artists Showcased at OCCA
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"Echoes: Women Inspired by Nature" will be Orange County Center for Contemporary Art (OCCCA) from April 5 through May 20. Curated by art historian Betty Ann Brown and Topanga-based visual artist Linda Vallejo, the exhibition will highlight the work of 21 women artists who focus on the natural environment. Among the artists featured in the show are two of Topanga's own--Vallejo and Raby Blake. In artwork that ranges from traditional easel painting, to the newer media of photography and installation, to the very Postmodern use of non-art materials such as Gummy Bear candies, these artists call out attention to the beauty and wonder of the natural world, and to humanity's deep and abiding connection with it. They also address issues such as pollution, over-consumption of resources, scientific atrocities and animal abuse.

We don't need to have seen Al Gore's compelling documentary, "An Inconvenient Truth," to become aware of the devastating environmental changes in recent years. On an almost daily basis, television newscasters report on the destructive results of toxic spills, raging fires, rising pollution, or the horrific storms exacerbated by climate changes. Although artists are neither politicians (no matter how politically engaged), nor environmental scientists (no matter how intrigued by the vicissitudes of scientific inquiry), they can and do respond to the state of the natural world around them. In creating new and intriguing images of nature, artists can compel us to view our natural environment with fresh eyes. As Rachel Carson has noted, "The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for destruction."

"ECHOES" ARTISTS

The "Echoes" artists listen to nature and tell of the stories they have heard. Some of the stories glory in nature's beauty and power. Others bemoan our ongoing abuse of nature. But all of them acknowledge our oneness with nature and our desperate need to respect and love her.

The artists respond to nature in three elegantly interconnected ways. They create art that reveals an awe of nature's beauty and power. They create art that manifests a feeling of meditative oneness with nature (rather than domination over nature or separation from it.) And they create art that mourns the losses from environmental abuse.

The section of the exhibit entitled "In Awe of Nature's Beauty and Power" takes its inspiration from Albert Einstein's quote, "Joy in looking and comprehending is nature's most beautiful gift." Vallejo's work is featured in this section and reflects her participating in a Native American ceremony and her keen awareness of the sanctity of nature. This section also displays the work of Patty Cox, Astrid Preston, Susan Silton, Miriam Wosk and Takako Yamaguchi.

The second section, titled "Meditative Oneness with Nature," is inspired by William Shakespeare's line, "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin." The section features work by artists Judith F. Baca, H. Barbara Cutler, Cheryl Ekstrom, Suvan Geer and Pamela Garu Tweena.

Blake's work is featured in the third section, "Mourning the Losses," inspired by Chief Eddie Benton Banai, Grand Chief of the Three Fires Society, who said, "Ultimately, it is the earth--which has supported us and loved us and caressed us--that we must now stand up for, for she is under the gravest danger ever in the history of man." Blake's work features fragile boats, evoking a nostalgic sense of loss. Also included in this section are Gummy Bear sculpture by Yaya Chou and works by Kim Abeles, Cheryl Marie Dullabaun, Samantha Fields, Linda Frost, Cheri Gaulke, and Holly Tempo."

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