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News

San Jose's ICA honors work, legacy of artist Steve French

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When **Cathy Kimball** came to the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art in 2000, artist **Steve French** took her under his wing. Already retired after a 32-year teaching and administrating career at San Jose State, French still introduced her to the key people on campus. He talked to her about the ICA's donors, and he provided a connection to artists from throughout the Bay Area. He taught many of them; he knew many, many more.

After a career spanning more than five decades, French died in 2014, leaving an artistic legacy stretching from Wisconsin, where he began his career, all the way to San Jose. And in November, the ICA opened two shows that celebrate French's deep creative impact on the valley.

[“Overture: The Art of Steve French”](#) is a retrospective of his work, showcasing pieces from as far back as his MFA portfolio from the 1950s to his most recent paintings, inspired by his backyard garden, from this decade. The other, [“Encore: The Legacy of Steve French,”](#) features the work of artists — including **Tony May**, **Marcia Briggs**, **Erin Goodwin-Guerrero**, **Katherine Huffaker Jones** and **Howard Ikemoto** — who were taught or inspired by French.

“He is the mid-late career, under-recognized and under-appreciated artist that I have a curatorial sweet spot for,” said Kimball, the ICA’s executive director. Dedicated equally to his studio practice and his teaching, she says French spent hours critiquing students work and managing faculty as dean of the School of Art and Design and then would go home to work in his own studio. He also served on the San Jose arts commission for several years, as well being an enthusiastic supporter — with his wife **Wanda Waldera** — of arts organizations from the San Jose Museum of Art and Works/San Jose to San Jose Stage and Opera San Jose.

“With all this, he had no time to get out and beat his own drum and promote his work to galleries and museums,” Kimball said. “For this reason, I am honored to be able to shed light on this incredibly prolific local treasure.”

Prolific is almost an understatement. The “Overture” exhibition includes some of French’s shaped prints from the late 1960s, paintings and metallic prints from the 1970s and bronze and acrylic constructions from the late ’90s. It’s a fascinating walk through an artistic career, and you should see it before the shows close Feb. 4.

“I miss him — his insightful advice and commentary, his laugh that could fill a room, and his gregarious personality,” Kimball said. “I’m just sorry he’s not here to see it and be congratulated by all the visitors who have come through and loved what they have seen.”

SEARCHING HIGH AND LOW: After 14 years as the executive director of the Rotary Club of San Jose, **John Kennett** will retire this spring. And that leaves the club's membership, myself included, wondering just how to replace a guy who's been doing a lot of juggling at one of the biggest Rotary clubs in the country. Well, **Jay Ross** — an attorney at San Jose law firm Hopkins & Carley and the current club president — says the club is officially on the lookout for the right person to fill Kennett's big shoes. The plan is to have someone in place by May 1, Ross said, so there's an active search on for qualified candidates — and if you're wondering what those qualifications are, you can find out at <http://sjrotary.org/indexfull.html>.

WE GOT NEXT: With Alabama's jaw-dropping win over Georgia in the College Football Playoff National Championship, Levi's Stadium is officially on the clock as it prepares to host the game on Jan. 7, 2019. 49ers President **Al Guido** and **Patricia Ernstrom**, executive director of the Bay Area host committee, were in Atlanta for the handoff of a ceremonial golden helmet trophy from this year's host committee. And if we're lucky, we'll have as thrilling of a game in Santa Clara this time next year.



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