

Judy Nilsen: il Fustino Gallery

With A Wink and A Nod

By ERIN J. SMITH / CASA

DRAWING INSPIRATION FROM THE WISDOM OF ROCK STARS, NASA SCIENTISTS, AND MISS PIGGY, Judy Nilsen has created a series of whimsical assemblages for her one-woman show currently on exhibit at il Fustino Gallery through August 31st.

“My artwork makes people happy,” she said. “It’s quirky with a sense of humor.”

Several of the 18 pieces incorporate quotes into their composition, such as *Artichoke*, which was inspired by Miss Piggy’s revelation that “After all the trouble you go to, you get about as much actual food out of eating an artichoke as you would from licking 30 or 40 postage stamps.” Another piece, *Boy Scout on Mars*, playfully imagines Jack Connerney’s observation that “If you’re a Boy Scout on Mars with a compass,



Judy Nilsen



Chains of Love by Judy Nilsen

you’re lost.”

Nilsen got her start in assemblage when she was inspired to participate in *What Will They Create*, Art from Scrap’s annual fundraiser, where artists build art pieces around a common object.

“I’ve done weaving, ceramics, painting, and fabric art. But with assemblage, you can bring all of these things together,” shared Nilsen. “It’s a challenge and a puzzle to come up with a good, artistic composition.”

Whether as an elementary school teacher, an arts advocate, or a working artist, art has been an important part of Nilsen’s life from the start. As a young person growing up in San Fernando, California, Nilsen had an active and enriching arts education. She regularly took part in Parks & Rec classes and was constantly creating art pieces for school projects. “We did everything in school,” she said. “We



Work of Art by Judy Nilsen

Painted murals, worked with paper mache and clay—everything.” Nilsen was also exposed to the arts through Girl Scouts. On a quest for a Girl Scout badge, Nilsen remembers going to the Huntington Library and being impressed by *Pinkie and Blue Boy*.

Nilsen went on to earn a Bachelors Degree in Elementary Education from California State University Northridge and a Masters Degree in American Folk Art from California State University Dominguez Hills. She has had a formal career in teaching elementary school and taught art for adults in Los Angeles. Nilsen moved to Santa Barbara upon her husband’s retirement and taught art at Montevista until turning to her own artwork full-time. Since moving to Santa Barbara, Nilsen has also become involved in local arts advocacy activities, including Santa Barbara Arts Collaborative and State of the Art Gallery Committee. She serves on the Arts Advisory for the City Council and is Chairman of VAPP (Visual Arts in Public Places).

“Art makes us human,” said Nilsen. “It’s important for artists to express themselves,



Painted Flowers by Judy Nilsen

but they also need to interact with an audience, even if it’s just in the mind.”

il Fustino is located at 3401 State St. Hours are 10am-5pm, Monday through Saturday. For more information, call (888) 798-4740.