

ON EXHIBIT | VCAC'S *REFLECT 2020*

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Dunbar, On Exhibit, Ventura | 0 🗨️ | ★★★★★



PICTURED: "Tree of Life," Belen Islas

by Marina Dunbar

The Ventura County Arts Council continues to bring inspiration in the midst of hardship as it presents its second COVID-compliant exhibition, *Reflect 2020*. Four storefront windows in Ventura each showcase a piece designed to reflect on both the trauma and triumphs of an unpredictable year. At the center of this exhibition is a downloadable treasure hunt where participants are invited to think more deeply about the artwork that they see and how it may be applicable to their own experiences.

Art has always been both a means and a reflection of community, as VCAC has unwaveringly demonstrated. Wendy Osher, VCAC president, explains how the nonprofit organization has worked to uplift the arts of our area. "Our main mission is to promote the potential of art to amplify and build the community in Ventura. With all the resilience and power for approaching things with new perspectives and energy that art can bring, we support artists and art organizations."

The showcase features four artists, each with a distinct style and thematic core. Carlos Grasso is a musician-turned-deconstructionist visual artist. His piece "COLORSPACE" contemplates the use of vibrant colors to brighten dark times. Josiah Guzik is a woodworking artist with a teaching background, and through "Nichos Volantes" he teaches us the significance of nicho cabinets in Latin America. Belen Islas is an artist whose work has been described as "magical realism," and her "Tree of Life" is an imaginative depiction of the vitality and resilience of an ecosystem. Lastly, Ksenia McEuen is an art academic whose piece "Divided By Six" tells a personal story of familial tribulation brought about by the pandemic.

The inspiration behind this exhibition was to have the community contemplate their shared experience of the COVID era.

"This was a great moment to provide artists with the opportunity to show work and give the public a chance to be inspired by something they didn't expect to see... a lot of people who wouldn't dare darken the door of a gallery or museum can just come see it," says Osher. "The theme of the show is reflecting on the experiences of this past year, which was something we never anticipated . . .it's a perfect opportunity for artists to share some of their takes and help others to reflect."

Like many others, artists have been very affected by the pandemic, both financially and emotionally.

"Artists feel it all in a very clear way, they already live on the edge to begin with . . . the ability to show and sell art has been impacted. There's also the isolation. People draw strength from getting together and comparing their experiences," explains Osher.

VCAC has continuously proven itself to be a hero to the local arts world, from delivering aide to artists in need following the Thomas Fire to supporting arts education for incarcerated youth. Preserving the arts is not a feat that can be done alone, however.

"The arts are in financial need . . . [residents can help by] supporting fundraising and initiatives within the county . . . a lot of people seem to think starving artists are the way of the world, but it really isn't. In many traditional societies, art was so essential there wasn't even a word for it. It was all so incorporated into their traditions as a society that it didn't require its own word."
