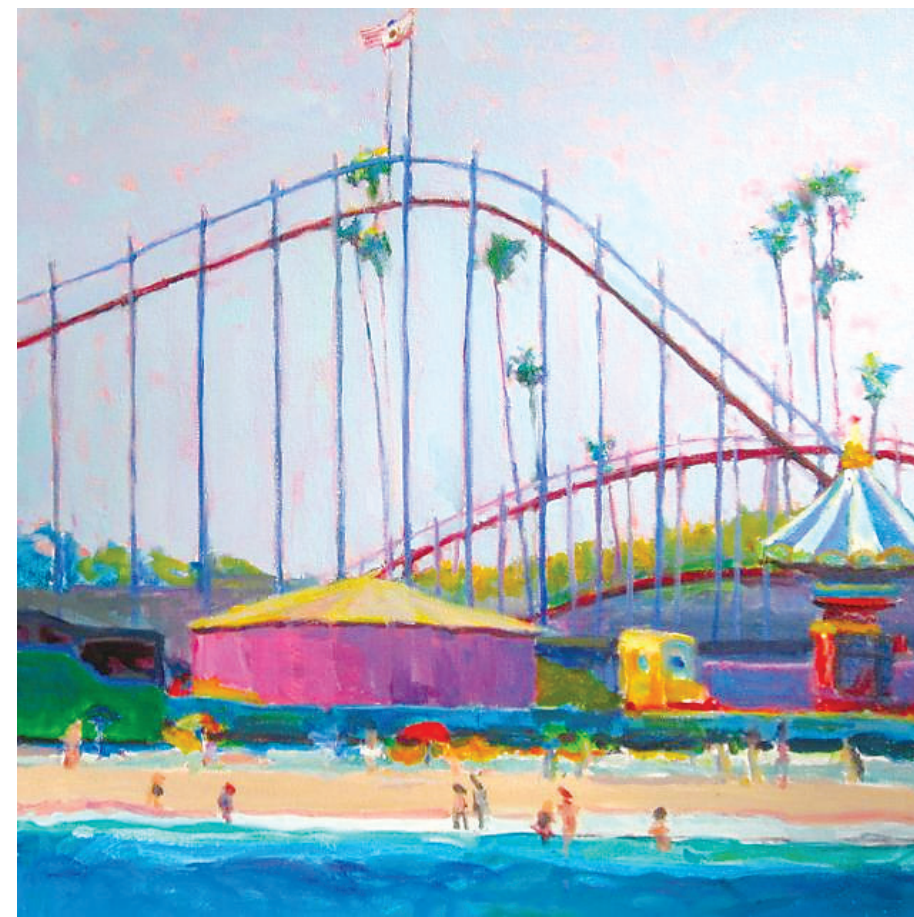


In Living Color

LESLIE TOMS CELEBRATES LIFE WITH A PAINTBRUSH



Leslie Toms in her home studio.



Museum in 1985, she was reminded of her love of painting. She made a point to pass by pieces by Thiebaud, Kondos, Elmer Bischoff, Richard Diebenkorn and Manual Neri on her daily breaks and, inspired anew, she returned to the medium and never looked back.

Since then, Toms' subjects have ranged from landscapes of California wine country to vistas of Tuscan village life (which got her "discovered" in Sacramento when the

Piatti restaurant group commissioned pieces for all 17 of their eateries) to close-up studies of sunflowers, which hold particular meaning.

"I was recovering from cancer surgery five years ago and people kept sending me flowers," Toms says. "My surgeon suggested that I start painting at the table to speed my recovery and get me working again, so I started painting the flowers people had given me. I now do a series of sunflowers every year—often inspired

by different artists—to celebrate the fact that I'm still here."

This is a philosophy that informs much of Toms' work nowadays. She often reflects on the fact that the career she chose perfectly suits the person—and artist she's become.

"I'm so happy that I made the choice to be a painter," Toms says. "I've never regretted it. It's difficult to be an artist. But doing this work every day—no matter how much or how little I make—has never made

me unhappy. We have a choice to make life what we want and I feel like I made the right choice."

Take a digital tour of Toms' work at leslietoms.com.

Jessica Laskey can be reached at jessrlaskey@gmail.com. ■

Leslie Toms' business card tells you a lot about her as a painter.

It's a 2.5-by-2.5-inch square—an unusual size and shape, but that makes the card stand out. The front features a high-gloss image of two sunflowers in a vase with her name printed across the bottom in bright red letters. The colors are so vibrant that you can't help but stare.

The card is the epitome of Toms' artistic style: a little different, a lot colorful and always pleasing to the eye.

When I visit her home studio in Campus Commons, where she's lived for almost a year, Toms is preparing for her first private showing and open house. It's a big deal that Toms finally has a space she can host in—she moved three times in two years following a divorce and a subsequent move out of her longtime home in East Sac looking for a new place to call her own. The property off Commons Drive not only fits her "even better than East Sac," it's also a mere 3.8 miles from her childhood home in Arden Park—a fact that might have shocked her younger self.

"I've loved to travel since I took the train to San Francisco with my grandmother at 5 years old," says Toms, seated at a glass table in front of one of her large California landscapes done in rich purples, pinks and blues—a palette that perfectly complements her beach-house-meets-

French-farmhouse interior aesthetic. "I went to college as far from home as I could (at Chapman University in Southern California) and I managed to travel around the world before the age of 21. I still love to travel, but now I find myself really slowing down and embracing Sacramento. Living somewhere so beautiful means I don't have to travel far to get subject matter."

Always artistic—she remembers painting on grocery bags as a kid—to pass the time—Toms was living on a houseboat in Holland during a year abroad in college when a visit to a museum sparked her career trajectory.

"I was sitting in front of Rembrandt's 'Night Watch' at the Rijksmuseum and I suddenly went, 'I'm going to go home and be an artist,'" Toms recalls.

She did just that. When she changed her major at Chapman—she had previously planned on becoming a U.N. translator—she lost many of her scholarships, so she transferred to Sacramento State and ended up studying under the tutelage of Wolf Kahn, Gregory Kondos, Charles Sovek, Harrold Gregor, Joseph Raffael, Ann Toulmin Rothe, Jerald Silva, Wayne Thiebaud and others.

"Wolf had the biggest influence on my style," Toms says. "I'd never felt so free—I paint from the gut, not the head, and color is very emotional for me. He and I were on the same wavelength. I discovered that I love to paint in a way that's fun and different. It's how I see."

Toms spent years working as a graphic designer and printmaker following her studies, but when she took a part-time job managing the museum store at the Crocker Art

As Seen In...



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By Jessica Laskey
Artist Spotlight