

# 'Transitions' Exhibit at the Moraga Art Gallery

By Sophie Braccini



Mary Leigh Miller, left, and K. de Groot present their creations.

Photo Sophie Braccini

Artists and friends K. de Groot and Mary Leigh Miller will feature their works of Asian-accented jewelry and pit-fired pottery as part of the Moraga Art Gallery exhibit, "Transitions," which opened April 18. The two artists, whose work is quite different, both use a variety of interesting techniques and materials to transform items of one form into something beautifully different.

During the first part of her married life, Lafayette resident De Groot lived in Bangkok where she worked as a docent in local museums and learned everything she could about local art forms and history. She began to collect art, including one-of-a-kind pieces that she used to make necklaces for herself. "When we would come back on home-leave from Bangkok, my friends would ask me to sell them my necklaces," she said, adding that she was reluctant at first, but gave in as her love for creating pieces grew.

She builds her creations around the pieces of art she collected all over Asia. A 100-year-old family heirloom pendant she bought in the Hunza valley of Pakistan is made of lapis with copper and silver and a wash of gold leaf. She chooses some because of their history and other less expensive pieces for their craftsmanship. "I have collected these pieces and sometimes find new ones with Asian deal-

ers that I know," explains de Groot. "Then the creative process of creating a necklace starts."

The jeweler buys beads that are both interesting and of the highest quality material – she has a vast collection of old Indian silver beads, for example, that she likes to include in her creations. Sometimes, the pendants require something unique, like one pure jade ornament representing a pomegranate for fertility that she found in a market in China. De Groot worked with a Nepalese jade dealer to find jade beads of different shades to create an interesting and sophisticated pattern.

De Groot has been part of the Moraga Art Gallery for some time and was asked to be its featured artist. She recently asked her friend, Moraga resident Miller, to join in.

Miller started creating her pottery in her early 20s when she was in art school studying to become a teacher. Over the years, ceramics became her media of choice. She produces many functional pieces, both wheel-thrown and hand-built. She is presenting the non-functional aspect of her production at the gallery in April and May. "Here I am presenting Raku and fire pit collectible pieces," she says. Miller says that she starts with an image in her mind, often of something in nature. "I am very attracted to textures, and I'm very organic," she

adds, "but I don't do sculptures. Most of my pieces have a container form."

Raku refers to a Japanese technique also called fast fire. The pieces are first fired (bisque) then return to the kiln with a glaze that contains copper. They are taken out of the hot kiln and thrown into a burning fire made of things such as paper or pine needles. "It bursts into flame (the kiln heats at more than 800 degrees)," says Miller, "then I take an empty bucket and put it over the piece. It puts out the fire and smokes the piece." The white clay turns black; the glaze with its copper content adds red and brown

tones to the pieces. Miller sometimes glues on bamboo leaves to some of her vessels before applying the glaze, creating a different tone in that area after the burning process.

She also uses a slow burning fire pit technique for her pieces. "This is a very primitive form," says Miller. "We start on a beach very early in the morning by digging a 15-foot long, 3-foot deep pit," she explains. "We add sawdust at the bottom, then we put down our pieces." Seaweed gathered on the beach and cow dung, which contains minerals that contribute to the process, are put into the pit. Cop-

per oxide and salt are sprinkled into the pit, then at least a cord of lumber is packed around it. Miller says that the preparation takes a few hours, before they set the pit ablaze. "Then we sit around for five or six hours while it slowly burns down," she says. The final pieces have random colors with brown, red, black and gray tones in interesting patterns.

The Moraga Art Gallery, which closed for repairs following a February flood, is located at 522 Center St. in the Rheem Valley Shopping Center and is open from noon to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday.

Saint Mary's College Museum of Art

## Four New Exhibitions



Accredited by the American Association of Museums and Galleries

Through June 21

### Visual Language: Mystery and Meaning



Thekla Hammond, Beginning

This exhibition serves as an invitation to explore the mystery and meaning of the visual image and to participate in a dialogue about visual language. Work by Cheryl Calleri, Christel Dillbohner and Thekla Hammond will be on view.

May 25 – September 6

### River Passage: New Work by Danae Mattes



Danae Mattes, Passage II

Bay Area artist Danae Mattes creates abstract, mixed media wall and floor objects using clay, paper and pigment, activated by water, which symbolically flows through all aspects of her life and art.

Through June 14

### Andy Warhol: Prints, Polaroids and Pop



Collection of the Saint Mary's College Museum of Art, Gift of the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts

The Saint Mary's College Museum of Art is pleased to exhibit a recent gift of seven screenprints from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.

Through September 6

### The Darker Side of William Keith: Late Paintings



Collection of the Saint Mary's College Museum of Art

Public Hours: Wed – Sun, 11 am-4:30 pm. Museum Admission: Adults \$5; Members and K-12 graders Free; Parking Free  
Phone: 925-631-4379 Website: stmarys-ca.edu/museum

## In Memory

### Captain Ward Hornblower Proescher

Aug. 31, 1935 – April 9, 2015



Captain Ward Hornblower Proescher passed away on Thursday, April 9, 2015 at the age of 79.

He was born on Aug. 31, 1935 in Cary, N.C. Following his graduation from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1959, he served in the Navy for several years aboard the USS Hermitage. After his service he moved to

California to pursue a diverse career – he started out in corporate sales, became a stock broker, and was a public speaker and lecturer. While living aboard a yacht in San Francisco he discovered a passion for entertaining friends on the Bay and turned it into a career.

In 1971 he married Susan Dittmar in San Francisco and together they founded Hornblower Yachts, which they ran together until 1980. In 1986 they started Commodore Cruises & Events, which is still run by the family to this day.

They raised their sons Toby and Morgan in Lafayette and enjoyed the beauty of the Bay Area as a family. In his final years, Ward, lovingly called "Skipper" by his grandchildren, enjoyed spending time with family and friends and, ever the Captain, spent as much time on the water as he could.

Ward is survived by Susan, his wife of 44 years, their sons Toby and Morgan, his daughters-in-law Sanda and Casey, his grandchildren Caroline, Maggie and Eva and his brother, Richard Proescher. He is preceded in death by his parents, Andrew and Gladys Proescher, and his brother, Andrew Jay Proescher.

A service will be held to honor Ward's life at 2 p.m. Sunday, April 26 aboard the Cabernet Sauvignon Commodore (2394 Mariner Square Drive, Alameda). In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Salvation Army.



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