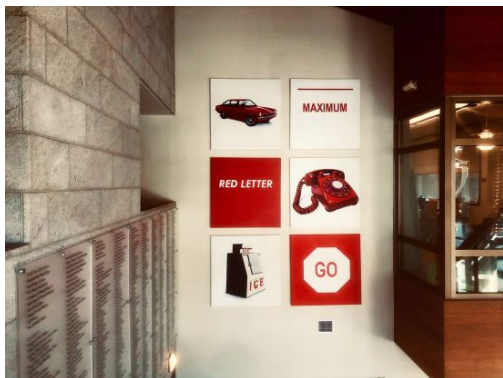


Published December 25th, 2019

Former city manager makes a statement at the LLLC

By Nick Marnell



"Red Letter" displayed in the LLLC permanent collection Photo, and artwork, by Steve Falk

Few artists want to explain the meaning of their work, or what it represents, leaving those answers for the public to determine. On that note, "Red Letter," the exhibit submitted by Steve Falk for display in the permanent collection of the Lafayette Library and Learning Center, will challenge the public for years to come.

Falk served as Lafayette city manager for 22 years before he departed in 2018. "We wanted to recognize his contributions to the city," said Erling Horn, chair of the city Public Art Committee which, together with the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce, offered Falk an intriguing parting gift: the opportunity to display a piece of his artwork on the mezzanine wall at the LLLC.

"At first I was intimidated by the scale - 13 feet high by 9 feet wide," Falk said. "But then I thought about what I wanted to accomplish. My main goal was to stimulate conversation."

From that goal arose "Red Letter." Falk prepared sketches for the art committee, the committee made suggestions and the city council greenlighted the project this past summer.

Falk, whose garage doubles as the art studio in his Lafayette home, had been working on the series of red objects for several years, and so the car, ice machine and phone were ready to go before the project started. He built the rest of the exhibit around those items. That powerful shade of red - cadmium red, medium hue - a color that Falk has favored for years, works especially well on a neutral background, he said.

But there is not much else neutral about the acrylic-on-canvas exhibit. Falk imagines a parent and a 7-year-old walking up the mezzanine stairs and the child asking if the bottom right-hand "Red Letter" element is a Stop sign or a Go sign. "In my mind, people will react to this in different ways, and develop their own sense of what the message is. Art can be decorative, provocative or both," Falk said. "That's what I was going for."

Of the six elements of his exhibit piece, Falk provided an explanation for only one of them: the white Red Letter painted on a red square, which he said alludes to Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter," a book featuring characters who lived out of the mainstream. "And libraries are collections of books," Falk said.

Is that what "Red Letter" itself symbolizes - elements out of the mainstream? What about the three items pictured - obsolete by today's standards. Does Falk's piece presage the obsolescence of today's technology? And the Maximum segment? Why is there a red line above the word? Why would Maximum be impeded by a hovering ceiling?

Falk prefers that the public come to the LLLC, check out his exhibit and question his work themselves. "If people are asking questions, it might change their perspective on the world," Falk said. "And that's what libraries do."

Reach the reporter at: nick@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA