



Mermaid Heritage

by Anna Zusman

COURTESY PHOTO

Mermaid tales

COME TO THE CITY

I wanted to become an artist for as long as I can remember. When my family first arrived in New York in 1990 as refugees from Moldova, we had to adapt in many ways. I am thankful to my parents who supported my passion for art and didn't push me into a practical profession like engineering or dentistry.

Art is a language that is fundamentally different from any other. It is said that 90 percent of information that enters the brain is visual. I feel that visual art allows me to convey certain essential truths about our experience that are impossible to express otherwise.

I just published a book of drawings called "Mermaid Heritage," which was originally inspired by the stories of immigrants. In the book, the mermaids function as an essential outsider, the ultimate "other." They don't look like humans and occupy an uneasy position within human society. The fantastical elements of mermaids provide an opportunity to consider complex social issues such as discrimination and medical experimentation outside of the traditionally politically charged discourse.

When I unveiled "Mermaid Heritage" in San Francisco, it was heartening to see how many people, particularly members of the LGBT community, immediately associated themselves with the mermaids in the book. One of the reasons I love San Francisco is that individuals who might have felt like outsiders elsewhere can come here to build a better life on their own terms.

I also genuinely enjoy sharing my passion for art with others. I espe-

cially love teaching at City College of San Francisco because it allows students from various backgrounds to get a diverse education that can propel them to a more fulfilling life.

California community colleges are unique in that they give so many people a chance to

achieve their goals without excessive debt. I feel honored to work in this system. I currently teach a basic design class that caters to a wide range of students from future graphic designers to artistically inclined accounting majors.

I think that art education is tremendously important. In the contemporary world, too many people spend their time staring at screens instead of paying attention to their surroundings. Art education enables us to become more aware of the visual aspects of our existence, from the facial expression of a loved one to the propaganda that surrounds us in the media. Students of art become more observant, thoughtful and conscientious individuals regardless of what major they ultimately pursue. They carry their appreciation for art and nature throughout their lives.

Through my own art I encourage people to confront life's vital questions in order to start focusing on what is most important to them. What were we put on this Earth to accomplish? What will be our reward or punishment?

Anna Zusman teaches at City College of San Francisco. Her exhibit "Do You Think You Can Tell if it's Heaven or Hell?" will be on display at the Diablo Valley College library from Jan. 24 until March 7. Her work can be seen at AnnaZusman.com.

VIEWPOINTS

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