



Sebastopol Times

The fantastical world of artist Teri Sloat

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Laura Hagar Rush



“Abundance” by Teri Sloat was created as a mural for the Gold Ridge tasting room. (Photo from Sloat’s Facebook page)

When Brooke Hazen, the owner of Gold Ridge Organic Farms, asked Sebastopol artist Teri Sloat to create a large mural above the bar in his tasting room, he had a pretty good idea of the kind of thing he’d be getting. He already had several of her vibrant, fantastical, folk-art pastels in the tasting room.

At the end of January, Sloat oversaw the installation of a large mural, called “Abundance” above the bar in the tasting room on Canfield Road. The mural, which is printed on a series of large vinyl sheets, is based on a 2’ x 4’ pastel painting.

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Hazen and Sloat discussed what he wanted beforehand. “He was so clear about the colors, the way the light shines on things. You can tell that he loves the art of what he does, as well as the actual farming of what he does. He's very tuned in to the colors of the different fruits and olives. But he also gave me almost totally free license with the mural, which was a gift,” she said.

The end result is a glorious work full of color and bursting with life. In the center are an indigenous woman and a fox — recurring figures in Sloat's work.

Sloat, who spent several years teaching indigenous children and working with indigenous people in the school system in Alaska, said she simply relates to the more connected view of nature common among indigenous tribes in the Americas and elsewhere.

“I'm not indigenous. But when I was in Alaska, and after ever since, I've much more connected with the school of thought that indigenous people have toward the land, everything being united. No gap between people and animals and land—that everything's together. So you'll find that in my art a lot.”

Artist Teri Sloat in the Gold Ridge tasting room. (Photo by Laura Hagar Rush)
Sloat says she came to her career in the arts through “the back door.” She and her husband worked as teachers in the Yup'ik community in Alaska. She got her start in the arts illustrating a series of bilingual Yup'ik/English language readers for young children.

“I had no idea how to be an illustrator except I'd done greeting cards for myself. So I took the job, and it was wonderful, because nobody had done it before. We had no idea if we did it right or wrong, we just did it. But we all worked at the whole process of making: it was the writing, the illustration, the collaboration with Yup'ik writers, the printing.”

“Getting paid to learn how to draw is quite the gift,” she said.

Even after she and her husband moved to Sebastopol in 1982, she continued working for many years with the bilingual reading program in Alaska, travelling up north frequently.

“It's a second home. It's actually a first home in my heart, but it's a second home,” she said.

Illustrating more than 250 Yup'ik readers, she developed her own unique style, and this led to a career writing and illustrating children's books, often with Alaskan themes. She's the author and illustrator of 25 children's books.

She also worked as a teacher and art teacher at Hillcrest for several years.

As a mature artist, Sloat has two distinct styles, which she defines as “traditional” and “narrative.” Her narrative style is brighter, more like folk art. She reserves this style for her illustration work and also a series of “interior landscapes,” like the aforementioned woman and fox series.

A fine example of Sloat’s “narrative style.” (Photo from Sloat’s Facebook page)
“My style is fairly naive. It’s not a sophisticated, realistic style,” she said. “Even my landscapes are not realistic. But I like the movement and patterns. And so they often end up in my landscapes as well. So I was just working on a landscape now of Sonoma hills and I love making the strokes around the trees go this way and the lines kind of dance around things a little bit.”

Her traditional landscapes are noticeably darker with less defined lines.



Teri Sloat’s “Cloudy Laguna Morning” (Photo from Sloat’s Facebook page)
Interestingly over the last year, the two styles seem to have merged—at least in some of the woman and fox series.



“Lit from Within” by Teri Sloat. (Photo from Sloat’s Facebook page)
As someone who never went to art school, Sloat recommends what she called “the back door” approach to life and work.

“I always tell people when I’m teaching, don’t be afraid to go in through the back door,” she said. “If the back door is open, go in. You do have to scramble to learn as much as the people that come in the ‘right’ way, but I think somehow, you end up learning different things. Because you have to observe so much, you don’t walk in feeling like you know how to do everything.”

Drop by Gold Ridge Organic Farms (goldridgeorganicfarms.com), Friday and Saturday, 10 am to 4 pm, at 3387 Canfield Road, Sebastopol, to see Sloat's new work, "Abundance." You can also find more of her work at terisloatfineart.com.

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