

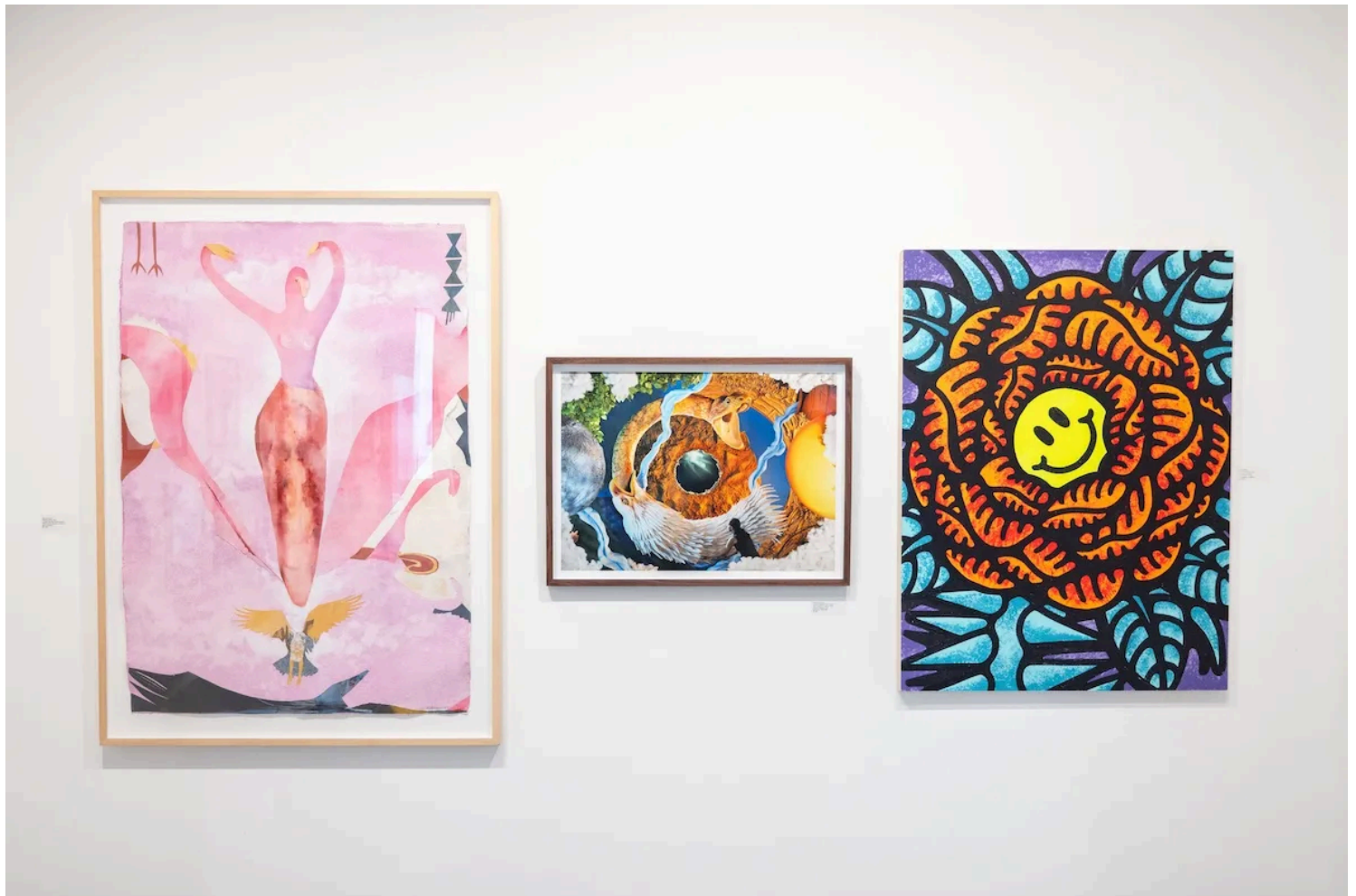
MCA Santa Barbara Celebrates Art and Imagination at 2025 Art Awards

The Museum of Contemporary Art's Art Awards Honor Five Groundbreaking Artists in their Creative Endeavors



By **Alice Dehghanzadeh**

Mon Jul 07, 2025 | 12:15pm



Arte Del Pueblo at MCASB | Photo: Courtesy



Mary Heebner | Photo: Courtesy

The Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara (MCASB) will be hosting their annual Art Awards on July 13 to honor outstanding creativity while supporting vital museum programs, operations, and exhibitions. It will be at The Arts Terrace in Paseo Nuevo, where the iconic tile staircase is, and this year's theme is "Myths and Legends."

Five outstanding artists will be recognized for their work: Mary Heebner, Dr. JoAnn Kuchera-Morin, Gabriela Ruiz, Manjari Sharma, and Diana Thater.

Mary Heebner is a Santa Barbara-based artist who focuses on multifaceted practices, such as large format collages and her imprint Simplemente Maria Press. Her work combines studio practice, writing, and papermaking to create hand-crafted books.



Dr. JoAnn Kuchera-Morin | Photo: Courtesy

Dr. JoAnn Kuchera-Morin is the director and chief scientist of the AlloSphere Research Facility at UC Santa Barbara (UCSB) as well as a professor at UCSB. “The culmination of her creativity and research is the AlloSphere,” a 30-foot-diameter sphere designed for immersive and interactive scientific and artistic investigation of multi-dimensional data sets.



Gabriela Ruiz | Photo: Courtesy

Gabriela Ruiz is a self-taught multidisciplinary artist from Los Angeles whose work reflects her Mexican heritage. She works in sculpture, video, painting, and apparel design, “blending diverse forms of expression and media.”



Manjari Sharma | Photo: Courtesy

Manjari Sharma is a Mumbai-born, Los Angeles–based artist who explores ritual, identity, memory, and mythology. She aims to “combine Indigenous knowledge systems with scientific concepts through immersive, lens-based art, using photography, sound, motion, projection, and collage in her storytelling.”



Diana Thater | Photo: Clement Vayssieres

Diana Thater is a Los Angeles–based artist who has “pioneered the use of film, video, light, and sound, continually challenging the boundaries of time-based media and installation art.” She explores the relationship between natural and man-made environments while “critically examining the structures of mediated reality.”



Board President [Frederick Janka](#) shared that the artists were chosen through a committee of museum supporters and staff. While recognizing artistic excellence, the awards also highlight artists in Santa Barbara and Southern California.

As for the reason behind this year's theme, Janka shared that after the group of artists were assembled, they began to explore conceptual links between them, leading to the "myths and legends" theme. "From Heebner's deep fascination with Greek mythology to Sharma's exploration of Hindu deities and Thater's intention to highlight the fleeting loss accelerated by the Anthropocene," Janka said, "myths and legends help explain the world around us."

When asked about the impact of these honorees' stories on the Santa Barbara community, Janka said, "We aim to inspire our community to seek creative solutions to the myriad of challenges we encounter while celebrating one another and what makes us human."

The Art Awards are not only an opportunity to celebrate these talented artists, but are also a critical chance to fundraise for the museum. "We call on our community to help us continue to keep our doors open and provide the important, free, and high-quality-of-life asset that the museum is to all locals and visitors alike," Janka said, "We can't imagine Santa Barbara without the Museum of Contemporary Art and the living artists and ideas of our time that we celebrate."

Janka also shared that all five artists will participate in the forthcoming 2026 exhibition, *Falling into the Future: Kinetic Art at the Edge of the World*.

The event begins at 4 p.m. on Sunday, July 13. There will be an arrival reception, buffet dinner and open bar, early access to new MCASB limited editions, and silent auctions, as well as after-hours access to the museum and the exhibition *Arte del Pueblo*. For tickets and more information, visit mcasantabarbara.org.



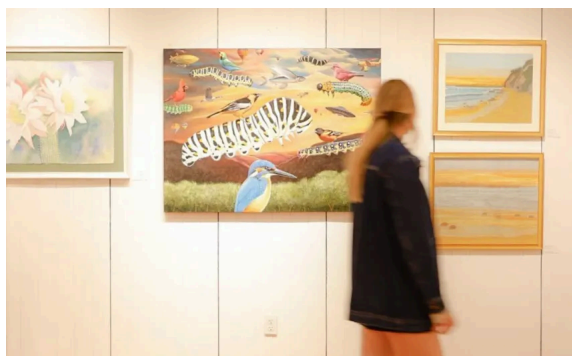
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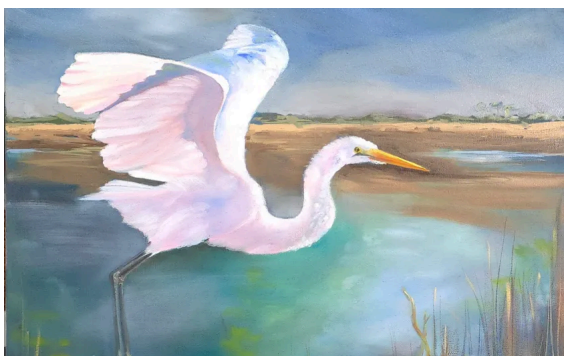
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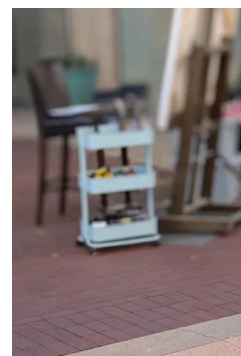
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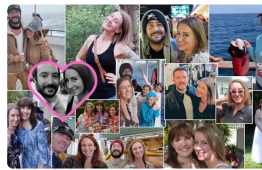
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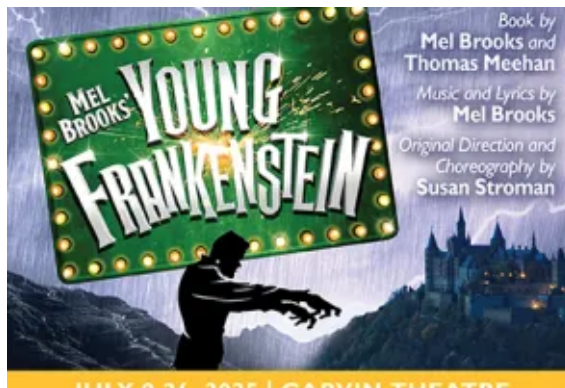
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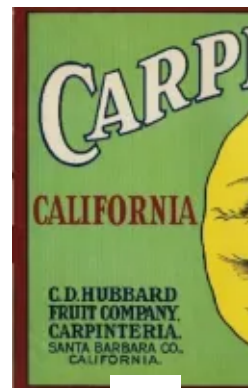
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