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Judy Foreman: Artist Hank Pitcher's New Book Paints Santa Barbara in a Bold Light

Monograph filled with familiar, iconic paintings of community's favorite faces and places from throughout the South Coast



By Judy Foreman,
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One of my first outings when the **coronavirus** lockdown started to ease was to pick up my long-awaited, signed copy of artist **Hank Pitcher's** namesake retrospective at **Sullivan Goss - An American Gallery** in downtown Santa Barbara.



Gallery co-owner Jeremy Tessmer, who represents Pitcher's work and published the book back in February, said the hardback has smashed expectations.

That's not surprising, but with 40 years of bold, iconic oil paintings from which to choose, selecting the ones to fill the **253-page collection** was a monumental challenge for Pitcher, Tessmer and Nathan Vonk, co-owner of Sullivan Goss at 11 E. Anapamu St.

Tessmer told **Noozhawk** he first talked to Pitcher about the project seven years ago, but studio work got in the way. They picked up that conversation four years ago.

"Hank is very articulate and thoughtful about design issues, but he is also a visual person," he explained. "He could see a prototype in print and he got very involved."





Together, they chose the monograph's images as well as writers with art historian chops — like [City University of New York](#) art history professor [Jennifer Samet](#).

"It was a very fulfilling project," Tessmer said. "Even after knowing Hank for 16 years, I still learned a great deal about him and his work."

Tessmer went through every [Kodachrome](#) slide in Pitcher's archive and fleshed out his timeline.

There are wonderful stories that Pitcher wrote about growing up in Isla Vista, playing football at [San Marcos High School](#), attending [UC Santa Barbara](#) and eventually teaching art, as well as priceless musings on his paintings and body of work.

Pitcher has lived in Santa Barbara for most of his life — he and his wife, Susan, raised two now-adult sons, Lincoln and Hart, here — but he got his art start in the early 1970s in New York City. There, he was inspired by artists [Charles Burchfield](#), [Jane Freilicher](#), [Alex Katz](#) and [Fairfield Porter](#).

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When I got home, I spent hours slowly turning the pages of this beautiful book, engrossed by the familiar images and Pitcher's personal voice.

As a professor at UCSB, a short hop from his beloved Coal Oil Point studio, he has introduced hundreds of students to environmental and figurative art. As an artist, he has made his mark by elevating Santa Barbara's signature look.

"Although Santa Barbara is a small place, it does have a remarkable place on the world map," said Tessmer, observing that owning a piece of Pitcher's work is like having a piece of Santa Barbara with you.

THE BOOK IS PACKED WITH BELOVED IMAGES THAT LOCALS LIKE ME CALL THEIR OWN. SURFBOARDS, THE CORAL Casino Beach & Cabana Club, the Gaviota coast, Point Conception, Coal Oil Point, Miramar Beach are all well-represented.

The figures and portraits section includes some of my favorites, like his wife, Susan, in a hammock; "Roy at Coal Oil Point;" "Woman with White Sunglasses;" and "Tandem Surfing" to name just a few from that section.

In 2004, I was asked to sit for a Pitcher portrait in a collaboration he did with Susan Pitcher's Coast Village Road boutique, **Dressed**. I have cherished memories of getting to know not just the artist but the then-**Santa Barbara Middle School** dad from hours of easy conversation, listening to jazz music and gazing out at the ocean from his studio.

"It is relatively easy to paint someone from a photo," Pitcher said of the finished work. "But being with a live person for a long period of time and staring at their faces has its risks."

That portrait is among my prized possessions, and my young granddaughters often stop to stare at the image of a woman in a hot pink cocktail dress with the plunging neckline and a leopard print coat.

"Is that really you?" they ask.

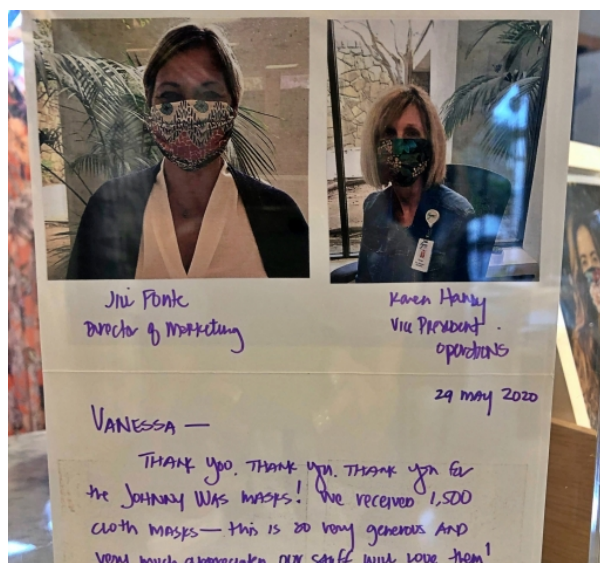
Well, I reply, like any book, painting or picture, it is one image of me from a different time in my life.

Tessmer summed up Pitcher's impact the best.

"Hank's paintings are worthwhile because they are authentic and beautiful," he said. "These days such stuff is in too short supply."

— *Judy Foreman is a **Noozhawk** columnist and longtime local writer and lifestyles observer. She can be contacted at news@noozhawk.com. [Click here for previous columns](#). The opinions expressed are her own.*

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