

by Ted Mills

Hank Pitcher's 'East Beach to Butterfly' Unearthed



"East Beach to Butterfly" is the work of Hank Pitcher

Once a longtime backdrop to a part of Coast Village Road shopping history, a **Hank Pitcher** canvas has been rediscovered, 30 years after it was hidden from the public. Out of sight, out of mind, this Pitcher work was thought lost. But now it is making its return to the spotlight with a special showing at the Lobster Town USA gallery on Santa Claus Lane.

Its re-emergence has brought up a lot of history and emotions for all parties involved. Family members have passed on, businesses have closed. And the location where Pitcher once stood to paint the Butterfly Beach landscape, looking down towards the Coral Casino "lighthouse" and Carpinteria beyond, has long since eroded into the sea.

Speaking for the painting's owners

is **Ingo Koch**, a longtime fisherman and electrical contractor. Though the painting has been part of the family since 1985, "We don't live in places with nine-foot ceilings," and so it will be put up for sale. The massive 9-foot-by-16.5-foot work was in storage at his stepfather's house. And now with his stepfather's passing, the painting has re-emerged, ready to move on.

Longtime Montecito residents might even recognize the work. It was commissioned by Ingo's mother, Carine Degli Esposti, for East Beach and Butterfly, the men's clothing store that was a partner business to Antoinette, one of the first stores in the strip mall currently anchored by Starbucks.

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Mermaids

Visualizing the Myths & Legends



Photography by
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On exhibit now through March 31, 2022

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"I was always posting pictures on social media, but very sporadically," he explained. "But when COVID hit, everything was just so negative on the news and social sites, so I decided to post one positive picture a day to combat all that."

Twenty months in, old friend **James Buckley** of Shoreline Publishing approached Eliason about putting together a book, with a few journalistic shots but mostly evergreen pictures of the area organized into several categories including Nature and Valley. *Santa Barbara and Beyond: The Photography of Mike Eliason* was published a couple of weeks ago, just in time for holiday gift-giving.

Rather than collecting pictures from his job, which he sees as "getting the news out accurately and timely, and educating the public to what's going on in their community," the 160-page book is filled with "pictures that make Santa Barbara so unique and beautiful," Eliason said. "I've been here so long, and the community has been so kind to me that I enjoy just driving around and documenting and showcasing what I see as a reflection of the community in pictures."

Eliason did an in-store event at San Ysidro Pharmacy last weekend and will sign copies again at Chaucer's Books on December 14 and The Mesa Bookstore on December 19. More information at <https://bit.ly/3pxilpT>.

Sing Out

The brand-new Santa Barbara Gay Men's Chorus makes its recital debut at 8 pm on December 13 at First United Methodist Church (305 East Anapamu Street) where the non-audition tenor-baritone-bass choir with no gender or sexual orientation requirements has been rehearsing since late September. UCSB's newish Director of Choral Music **Nicole Lamartine** leads the ensemble, which stands at about two dozen members.

"That's a pretty good number considering the pandemic," Lamartine said. "We want to open our doors to everyone, including some who have never sung in choir before, which is a big part of my expertise. They wanted a community, and a place where they could feel safe and make friends while making music. My job is to facilitate all of that and I'm just thrilled. And they sound great."

The concert features a selection of winter choral music and carols. Suggested donation is \$15. Visit <https://sbgmc.org>.

Classical Corner: Music Academy Makes Move

The Music Academy of the West has appointed **Daniela Candillari** to the new position of Principal Opera Conductor for the next three summer festivals, quite a coup for the endlessly ambitious Academy. Candillari, who made her MAW debut helming the Academy's West Coast premiere of **Jennifer Higdon's** *Cold Mountain* in 2019 and led the singers on a program of all contemporary vocal chamber music last August, was slated to make her Metropolitan Opera debut on December 8 conducting *Eurydice* from composer **Matthew Aucoin**, who appeared as both a guest conductor and composer at the Music Academy in 2016-17. We're imagining her appointment signals a commitment to contemporary operas by MAW for the next few years. Meanwhile, *Eurydice* will screen at Hahn Hall on December 12 as the next installment in the rebroadcast series of the Met's Live in HD series. Details at www.musicacademy.org.

Focus on Film: Awards Announced

With the 37th Santa Barbara International Film Festival slated to open in less than three months, the fest has already named two of its major award winners for the March 2-12, 2022, festival. **Will Smith** and **Aunjanue Ellis** will receive the Outstanding Performers of the Year Award for portraying former husband and wife Richard Williams and Oracene Price in *King Richard*, the bio-drama about the father and coach of tennis superstars **Venus** and **Serena Williams**. The twice previously Oscar-nominated Smith — whom SBIFF honored with its highest award, the Modern Master, way back in 2007 — is considered one of the favorites to take home a statuette in April. **Kristen Stewart** gets SBIFF's American Riviera Award on March 4 for a career topping performance in *Spencer* where she also portrays a real person, Princess Diana. SBIFF is also hosting a special screening of *Spencer* followed by a Q&A with director **Pablo Larraín** on December 9. Visit www.sbiff.org.

Meanwhile, longtime SBIFF executive director **Roger Durling** drops by Chaucer's Books on December 13 to sign and talk about *Cinema in Flux*, the curated collection of essays he wrote recommending films to watch during COVID's darkest lockdown days, offering insights reflecting on what was happening around us as both a commemoration and celebration of cinema providing hope.

Painted across three vertical canvases, Pitcher's landscape was displayed with the left and right wings at an angle, following the design of the store's walls. And there it remained, used as a recognizable image in the East Beach and Butterfly's advertising for years until business dropped. The Espostis took out the men's section, moved in women's intimate apparel under the new name Intimo, and the painting got walled up in 1991. Instead of being removed, it disappeared behind a store divider.

"To both owners, this was their favorite stretch of beach," Pitcher recalled about the commission. "He [Rino Degli Esposti] was from Italy, and they had a house in Italy. The idea was that when they retired, they could take back a little piece of Santa Barbara and put it in their house."

Those plans never came to fruition; the Espostis stayed in town.

"I had forgotten about the painting," Koch says. "My brother (who is a general contractor) had not."

In 2016, when the store's original location closed, they knew enough to not knock the wall down with a sledgehammer, but to uncover the canvases and move them back to the family house. (Intimo and Antoinette closed for good this year.) Koch's mother Carine had long since passed and with his stepfather also ill, he describes a house "frozen in time." The canvases froze too, still wrapped in plastic from their entombment.

"It brings back memories for me, for sure," he says.

Koch, who is an electrical contractor, was storing the canvases for view at his shop on Nopal Street. He's still building his new storefront, having moved from his space in the same strip of businesses as Lobster Town USA. **Maire Radis**, who owns not just the gallery (formerly Porch), but the building it is housed in, will be hosting the work for view and for sale.

With only some slight restoration needed, the Pitcher piece looks like it was painted yesterday.

But how much would a large Hank Pitcher be worth? Sullivan Goss, who has represented the Santa Barbara-based painter since 2001, would help determine that, if and when asked. Sullivan Goss has given Pitcher several solo shows since 2001 — seen as the beginning of his second wave of success — and published a career-spanning hardcover book on him in 2017. In a chronology section near the back, a photo shows the painter standing next to the East Beach and Butterfly painting. At the time it was considered a lost work.

A smaller study of the same landscape was shown in the gallery some years ago at Pitcher's "Montecito Beaches" show. The larger version is more detailed, a slight shift in perspec-



The painting was done in three sections

tive revealing the faux lighthouse. Right in the middle, in the distance, a flagpole flies the Stars 'n' Stripes.

"Hank is trying to make a formally sophisticated painting that also documents a place that he has a connection to that you and I can barely understand," says Sullivan Goss' **Jeremy Tessmer**.

In 1985, Pitcher was renting a house on Miramar Beach to the south. This was his neighborhood at the time and the work of this era documents all different viewpoints of this stretch of sand, looking out towards the islands or back towards shore or up and down the coast. He was also about to get married, and one stipulation along with the money for the commission was a wedding gift. The soon-to-be future Pitchers would be honeymooning in Italy, and from the Espostis, he asked for and received a list of their favorite secret eateries.

"That was the most fabulous gift," Pitcher recalls. "We would walk into places that [tourists] would just walk past and have the most fabulous meals. We'd say Carine from Santa Barbara sent us."

"There are many paintings like this," says Tessmer on Pitcher's body of work. "When you find lost treasures like this, there are people who know, there are records somewhere, but we don't know about it yet."

"I'm a lot better than other people [in keeping track of my work], but that's mostly due to my sister who loves to organize things," Pitcher says when asked how many works of his are out there, undocumented. "All I do is paint. So, there's a lot of paintings out there. Occasionally they show up in weird places."

"East Beach to Butterfly" will be available for viewing during Lobster Town USA's regular hours (Thursday, Friday, and Saturday from 12-5 pm) for the next two weeks and limited days after that due to the holidays. Also available to show by appointment.

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