

# Find freedom from shame in 'LibeRATED Forms' exhibit



**Lisa Deaderick**  
COLUMNIST

Patric Stillman understands and sees the fear, and his response is to confront it. The gallerist of The Studio Door in Hillcrest has noticed a reticence to display erotic art in other spaces, like galleries and museums.

People continue to be dually fixated on, and uncomfortable, with expressions of sex and sexuality.

In the art world, he knows that means that many artists who create work exploring this topic have a hard time sharing their work in the open. His new exhibition provides a space for those artists and for patrons.

"I really wanted to see art that was a high quality, looking at the diverse human experience, so I reached out to artists, looking for them to showcase what sexuality meant to them and bring that forward through their art, whether it's sculpture or photography or painting," he said of going through the submissions for this show. "The same principles applied to the quality of the artwork, but allowing for this freedom that artists don't often have, to be able to create something of this nature and have it hung."

"LibeRATED Forms" is a national exhibition opening Thursday and will be on display through Aug. 31, with a public reception scheduled for 2 p.m. Saturday (guests must be 18 or older, with identification, and no photography will be allowed in the gallery during the exhibit).

As part of the gallery's 10th anniversary this year, Stillman wants to celebrate diversity and desire, calling for artwork that is body-positive and sex-pos-



"Human," by artist Sarah Amarin-Cruz, is part of the new "LibeRATED Forms" exhibition at The Studio Door in San Diego's Hillcrest neighborhood. The exhibition runs Aug. 8-31. **SARAH AMARIN-CRUZ**

itive to create a space for safe dialogue about sex and sexuality.

There is work on display by more than 40 artists from multiple states across the country.

To talk about the themes of this show, along with Stillman, is Janna Dickenson, an assistant teaching professor at UC San Diego and licensed clinical psychologist whose research and work is focused on sexual literacy and sexual well-being. (These interviews have been edited for length and clarity.)

**Q: Tell us about "LibeRATED**

**Forms." How did the idea for this exhibition come together?**

**Stillman:** As part of the 10th year of the business, I really wanted to celebrate all year long and try some things that I felt I hadn't done with the gallery before. I always hope that the gallery is able to observe the gaps in the arts community in San Diego and step up to kind of fill in those spaces.

So often, I've either seen erotic art in spaces that are more like community hubs, like bars or small little arts moments in other spaces, but I've never really seen a strong,

high quality art show locally in some kind that was related to erotic art, so I decided to create a national visual arts exhibition called "LibeRATED Forms," and I wanted to celebrate diversity and desire by creating a safe space for dialogue and discussion around contemporary experiences of sex and sexuality.

At the same time, really help artists uplift their marginal voices surrounding sex and sexuality and the spectrum of human experience.

**Q: Why did you want to celebrate diversity and desire?**

**Stillman:** I think that, if we go back in time to the '50s and the censorship around Allen Ginsberg's "Howl," which was taken to court and he won, it was sort of a triumph for freedom of expression and really kind of ushered in a change, I think, in American arts.

It allowed art to challenge, provoke and explore the human experience. (Published in 1956, Ginsberg's public performance of the controversial poem led to a trial in 1957, in which a Bay Area district attorney wanted Ginsberg's book, "Howl and Other Poems," banned for obscenity because of the use of profanity, descriptions of homosexuality, drug use, and other language. The case was dismissed.)

So I wanted to use some of those same ideas and bring them into today's world because I feel that freedom of speech in visual arts is still something that is tamped down.

So I wanted to give the artists that opportunity to be able to create what they wanted and set it in a nice gallery experience that elevates those ideas.

**Q: What role do you think art can play in boosting body and sex positivity?**

**Dickenson:** I think art is a phenomenal mechanism to get our culture to be more, not just

sex-positive, but by emphasizing a sexual well-being perspective. I think that art has the power to change the way that we see the world.

I think it allows us to connect and to relate to things that we may not have thought that we were able to relate to in a particular way.

I think that it allows us to awaken to new perspectives. I think art is a really nice avenue for people to take in information and to also generate the aspect of reactions that we need in order to have open dialogues about sexuality.

**Q: Ideally, what kinds of conversations would you hope would come as a result of people visiting this exhibition?**

**Stillman:** I think that because it's an area that people don't often freely discuss because they feel it's taboo, or shameful, or simply private, I'm hoping that there are discussions about how universal the experience truly is, regardless of identity and sexual practice.

**Dickenson:** I think, like the curator, open dialogue. The more that we talk about sex, the better off we are as a culture because it's not just the less sexual shame you have, but the more free you'll feel about your own sex and sexuality.

That, I think, is a major reason why going to an exhibit like this would be good for people, as an individual, but also for our society.

The more open dialogue that we can have, the less taboo sex eventually will be.

You get information, too, just from simply talking about sex with other people.

It can be really enlightening and people often walk away from them talking about their sex life, feeling like they've been heard or that people can relate to them, and that feeling of being able to relate in your sexuality I think is very positive for your overall well-being.

## FROM THE ARCHIVES

# PREPARING FOR THE OLYMPICS



With the Paris Games ongoing, From the Archives goes back to July 24, 1972, for this Olympics-related photo. Mike Troy speaks with candidates for the U.S. Olympic swim team at the Coronado Municipal Pool. The candidates, from left, are Mike Stamm, 19; Susie Defay, 18; and David Johnson, 18. Stamm won gold at the 1972 Munich Games as part of the 4x100 medley relay. Troy won two golds in swimming at the 1960 Summer Olympics in Rome. **SAN DIEGO HISTORY CENTER**

## WILDFIRES

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ing huge amounts of fuel for wildfires, forecasters say.

The good news is that the public now more easily can see images of wildfires as they erupt and spread due to the wider use of AlertCalifornia, a statewide network of live fire and weather cameras operated by UC San Diego.

The cameras helped firefighters spot and fight the Grove fire near Palomar Mountain on July 24 and the nearby Nixon fire around the Riverside County line Monday.

The fires erupted about the time UCSD's camera network was being added to Watch Duty, an easy-to-use wildfire app and web site run by a nonprofit based in Sonoma County.

The system's photos are combined with the latest news about specific fires, including evacuation notices. And there's animation of the paths that aircraft are taking as they help fight such blazes. Dozens of employees are responsible for keeping the site current, including five news reporters, says John Mills, who co-founded Watch Duty three years ago.

The site's basic features are offered without charge to the public. They're already widely used by first responders, forecasters and utility companies, including San Diego Gas & Electric, which monitors the threats posed to power grid by fire and wind.

"A lot of times the information provided (by fire experts) is corroborated by what they are seeing on Watch Duty," said Chris Arends, who coordinates SDG&E's meteorological program.

Watch Duty followed the lead of Cal Fire, which added AlertCalifornia to its digital offerings in February. The agency is responsible for fighting wildfires throughout California, where about 770,000 acres have burned so far this year. The figure for all of 2023 was 26,000.

Cal Fire currently doesn't have an easily downloadable and up-to-date app for wildfires. But it has placed UCSD's camera images in a prominent spot on its website. And it has the capacity to distribute them more broadly, having mastered the art of placing them on social media platforms.

But Cal Fire, Watch Duty and other outlets suffer

from a significant problem not of their own making.

The San Diego County Sheriff's Department has sole responsibility for issuing wildfire evacuation notices, and many consumers have complained that alerts are written in jargon and can be hard to understand, especially in a stressful situation like a wildfire.

In particular, the evacuation maps tweeted out during the Grove fire drew criticism for the lack of clarity. The problem, a county spokesperson said, was that the maps were zoomed too far in, showing no roads or landmarks to indicate what part of the sparsely populated area was targeted for evacuation. Officials were made aware of the problem, and adjustments will be made, he said.

Consumers have to deal with another significant problem: There are lots of useful and potentially lifesaving wildfire tools spread across many apps and websites — but the best offerings have yet to be pulled together in one place.

Watch Duty may evolve into a one-stop shopping site for such data. But that won't happen this fire season.

Until that's done, consumers also should

know about two other sites.

SDGE Weather, which is available as an app and on a website, [weather.sdge-weather.com](http://weather.sdge-weather.com), features a fire potential index that estimates the likelihood of wildfires breaking out across its service area over a seven-day period. The tool also estimates how fast the winds will blow and how hot the weather will become — a feature that can be especially useful for spotting the onset of Santa Ana winds.

There's also the National Weather Service in San Diego. The recent Grove fire was sparked by lightning — a common cause of wildfire this time of year. Forecasters follow such systems very closely, and rapidly post notices that say where the parent thunderstorm is located and where the system might go. Their advisories typically include maps that help consumers see where a thunderstorm is in relation to their home.

Forecasters also issue special alerts — something that happened Thursday when more than 1,200 lightning bolts were recorded flashing in the sky across East County.

*Staff writer Teri Figueroa contributed to this report.*

## RAIL

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project. It eventually will span 42 miles from the Oceanside Transit Center to the Santa Fe Depot in downtown San Diego. Both trails are priority projects in the San Diego Association of Governments' regional bike plan.

The regional plan

proposes a system of interconnected paths, support facilities and programs to be pursued through the year 2050 to make biking more convenient for everyday travel.

Pedal-powered transportation could help resolve a wide range of complex issues such as traffic congestion, air quality and public health problems, according to planners.

## DETOX

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to the Paul Mirabile Center ceasing to be a city-funded shelter, expiring permits and new development should cause San Diego to lose access to an additional 380-plus beds by January.

One plan to partially plug that hole — renovating an empty warehouse in the Middletown neighborhood — has been delayed over concerns that the multi-decade lease would introduce too many legal and financial risks.

But the county's lack of detox beds is perhaps even more severe.

There are currently only 78 spots that accept Medi-Cal, the state health insurance for low-income residents, according to data from county spokesperson Tim McClain. Another 21 are scheduled to come online by September.

At the same time, drugs like fentanyl are increasingly deadly, and last year the county medical examiner counted at least 375 homeless people who died from drug-related causes.

Officials noted Wednesday that efforts to create more detox facilities have been hindered by several factors, including red tape and the stigma sometimes attached to substance use disorders. Marisa Varond, head of the El Cajon-based McAlister Institute, said attempts to expand her nonprofit's addiction recovery services have long run into roadblocks.

Father Joe's move was influenced by the City Council's crisis declaration late last year over a lack of behavioral health beds and the nonprofit hopes new permits will quickly be granted under San Diego's expedited permitting process.

The Paul Mirabile Center has already stopped accepting new residents. Over the next few months,

Father Joe's plans to spend about \$1.5 million renovating the space as current clients trickle out.

The organization will apply this month for money through Proposition 1, the voter-approved initiative allowing California to borrow billions for new housing and treatment beds, yet leaders believe most of the center's funding must come through philanthropy.

If all goes well, 45 detox beds should open up around New Year's. The accompanying recovery program will last two weeks, and graduates can then move up a floor where there's space for 250 men and women.

"This is something that's been weighing on me now for at least a couple of years," deacon Jim Vargas, Father Joe's president and CEO, said in a phone interview. "We're losing our people on the streets."

The building already has medical, dental and behavioral health clinics, which could be crucial for addressing problems that can accompany addiction, such as skin lesions or damaged teeth.

A spokesperson said the nonprofit would hire at least one additional supervisor and two more case managers for the center, although the total number of staffers needed is still being determined. It also wasn't immediately clear how much the new program will annually cost.

Campillo, the council member, said the issue had become personal for him since his brother overdosed on opioids a decade ago. He brought up Robert Downey Jr., whose triumphant recent appearance at San Diego Comic-Con capped a career that once seemed derailed by addiction, and offered a quote often attributed to the actor: "Just because you hit bottom doesn't mean you need to stay there."