

# Lafayette artist rises from ashes to create new works inspired by local landscapes

By Kara Navolio



Suzy Elsworth-Heithcock and one of her paintings.

Photo provided

When your home catches fire and you lose everything, including your life's work of paintings, it might be hard to imagine recovering from such a devastating loss.

But recover is exactly what Lafayette artist Suzy Elsworth-Heithcock did. It has taken eight years, however, to complete enough work for a solo exhibition. Elsworth-Heithcock's first solo show is on display through Aug. 14 in the Walnut Creek City Hall lobby.

The blaze occurred in the summer of 2009 after workers left flammable rags under the house that ignited from the hot weather. "Losing four of our five cats was the worst part," reflected Elsworth-Heithcock. "We were lucky that no people were hurt or that the fire didn't spread to other homes. We were not home, so it wasn't possible for us to rescue anything. We lost 10,000 books, our photographs. We had to replace every

glass, toothbrush, pair of socks." The only examples of any of her previous artwork are a handful of giclée prints of some of her earlier paintings.

The home took two years to rebuild and restock. "The silver lining is that I got to redesign my house, but everything you see is new," she noted. "There is nothing here from our travels or with family history."

The insurance paid nothing, however, for her lost art. Since she had not yet sold any pieces there could be no value attached to them. "That was pretty devastating to be told that your work had no value," Elsworth-Heithcock recounted.

Painting became part of her emotional healing process. As the house was being re-built, she began to explore the open space around her home and in the Briones Regional Park. Her new painting style was influenced by the beauty around her and her recent experiences. She began to work in a larg-

er format with a looser style. She often took photos and then transformed the scenes into beautiful paintings that have a sense of surreal realism and celebrate life and the joy of nature.

Many of the eight paintings in the exhibit are landscapes from the local area. "I am conscious of the fact that everything moves, even rocks and mountains, and even if we as humans can't perceive the movement in the time span we are here. I want people to know that nothing is static," explained Elsworth-Heithcock. This movement shows in her landscapes with her flowing brush strokes.

Elsworth-Heithcock has shown her work in several local galleries this year, but this is her first solo exhibition. The work can be viewed Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at 1666 N. Mani St. in Walnut Creek, or on her website: [elsworthartworks.com](http://elsworthartworks.com).