



COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

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NEWS RELEASE

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SPOTLIGHT AWARD RECIPIENTS AND EXHIBITION

The Santa Cruz County Parks Department is pleased to announce the Santa Cruz County Arts Commission's 2025 Spotlight Award recipients: Katie Simpson (mixed-media paintings), Priscilla Martinez (mixed-media paintings & digital graphic design), and Kara Saiki (papier-mâché masks). The artists' work will be exhibited on the 5th floor of the County Government Center (701 Ocean St., Santa Cruz) through October 14, 2025. A First Friday opening reception will be held August 1 from 5 p.m.-7 p.m. See <https://firstfridaysantacruz.com/events> for more.

Kara Saiki is a young, ambitious, local artist who has been interested in art from an extremely young age. Over the past two years, Kara has channeled most of her creative work towards the theater, creating stage props, painting set pieces, and even creating costumes. Although she works in a variety of mediums such as painting, sketching, and digital art, one particular medium has allowed Kara to bring her artwork to life in three dimensions: papier-mâché. This unique and dynamic method brings together aspects of various mediums, which allows her to create everything from delicate objects to ferocious creatures using nothing but scrap materials, flour, glue, and paint. Kara hopes to continue to work in theater, however she will definitely continue to explore new projects and mediums in her free time.

Katie Simpson is an artist, nature enthusiast and educator from Aptos, with an MFA in Studio Art from the City College of New York, CUNY, and a BA in Drawing, Painting and Printmaking from Portland State University. Katie's primary artistic focus is acrylic mixed media paintings that combine drawing, painting, printmaking, and other media – and her work circles in on nature in various ways. She shows regionally and is often part of Open Studios. Katie is currently Arts Education Manager at Arts Council Santa Cruz County, and has been teaching with the Arts Council since 2019, as a SPECTRA Artist and with Mariposa Arts. She loves teaching art to people regardless of age, as art helps us all reach our awesomeness. She has taught

drawing, painting, printmaking, paper arts, mixed media painting, and bookbinding to students ranging from kindergarten to college level. Katie digs fostering fun creative community connections. She is super excited about art and nature, and she is ready to get everyone else excited too.

Priscilla Martinez is a Latina artist and illustrator, born and raised in Watsonville, California. She began painting murals as a senior at Watsonville High. After graduation, her passion for the arts brought her to Cabrillo College, where she took art classes while also working full-time. Over the years, she has developed as a professional artist and has produced a recognized body of work in Watsonville. She created the official Watsonville Strawberry Festival Poster for seven consecutive years, as well as numerous posters and murals for local merchants, service organizations, schools and public agencies. In 2018, her design was selected for Monterey County's first Official Government Flag. Additionally, she has shown her work at Pajaro Valley Art Gallery and created art for two utility boxes on Main Street in Watsonville. Priscilla's work is inspired by her culture, community, music, and the beauty of the land around her. She often uses bright bold colors and illustrations in the style of Mexican traditions to integrate in her art pieces. Her goal is to create pieces that are attractive, captivating, and tell a story.

Through the Spotlight Award, the County Arts Commission publicly recognizes individuals who have achieved a high level of excellence and creativity in their work, but who have not received widespread acknowledgment of their talent. This annual award recognizes younger artists as well as those who are discovering their artistic voice later in life. For more information, visit <https://parks.santacruzcountyca.gov>.