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## Able Artists: Laband art exhibit shines a light on marginalized creators

By Bridgette M. Redman, Argonaut Contributing Writer

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Marlena Arthur's "Cutie Marks" is a color pencil and graphite work representing the intricate world building the artist engages in. Her work is on display at Laband Art Gallery. *(Tierra del Sol Studios/Submitted)*

Visitors to Loyola Marymount University's Laband Art Gallery this year are greeted by the colorful and diverse work of seven artists who face more than the usual barriers to exhibiting their work.

With just a few weeks left in the exhibition, "Here Comes the Sun: 7 Artists from Tierra del Sol Studios," the gallery staff will be holding a community discussion called, "Art Disability and Justice" at 12:15 p.m. Friday, March 24, at Murphy Recital Hall. They'll host members of the Tierra del Sol Studios community to talk about what it means to not only create art as a person with disability but to make a profession of it.

Panelists include artists Marlena Arthur and Evan Hynes, mentor Maddy Inez Leeser, program director Rebecca Hamm and gallery director Paige Wery. Laband Gallery Director Karen Rapp will moderate the discussion.

Tierra del Sol Studios is a part of the Tierra Foundation, an organization that empowers people with developmental disabilities to live full lives, pursue education and participate in fulfilling professions. Tierra del Sol Studios helps support those who want to pursue careers in the arts.

The panel discussion is open to the public and Rapp said she hopes it will focus on some of the challenges artists with disabilities face.

Rapp learned about Tierra del Sol Studios while helping with a review panel looking at art for the county of Los Angeles. Several of their artists had submitted work. Then Tierra opened what Rapp described as a magical space in Downtown Chinatown area.

“It is a very exciting place to see art,” Rapp said. “This is a space where the artists who work with Tierra are selling work.”

She was impressed with what she saw and decided to visit the studios. It was there she saw how serious the organization was at supporting these individuals who were pursuing careers in the arts. Of the 800-some people in all the Tierra del Sol programs, 120 were participating in the careers in the arts program.

It was then that Rapp knew she wanted to have an exhibition with their work at Laband.

“At a place like my university at LMU, this idea of always wanting to stand with people at the margin is so strong, that’s such a Jesuit Catholic declaration,” Rapp said. “There are so many ways of valuing and critiquing art and artists.”

In addition to Arthur and Hynes, other Tierra artists in the exhibition include Shaina Barnett, Herb Herod Jr., Ericka Lopez, John Maull and Jeffrey Rinsky. The exhibition displays more than 100 works on paper and ceramics and is on view until Saturday, March 25.

The work varies from still lifes to colorful abstract ceramic sculptures to tiny renditions of classic guitars.

Rapp said that while it was difficult to select only seven of the 120 artists at Tierra del Sol, she sought to have a spectrum of work that showed the breadth of the studio's works. She described it all as phenomenal and spectacular.

While it is a group show, Rapp arranged it to give each artist a mini exhibition.

"There's this inherent feeling of wanting to make every artist work and for the ideas in the work to come across as strongly as possible, but it's a certain balance," Rapp said. "Each one of the seven artists has their own part of the gallery and within that space, I am trying to convey the power and motivation in the art making, to have people really experience being with the art."

As an example, she used Arthur, who draws and works with ceramics. She recently turned 29 and has been with Tierra for nearly 10 years. During that time, she developed her own very intricate cast of female superheroes, women deeply committed to taking on societal problems. She has more than 30 characters and each one has her own biography and iconography.

Arthur's art has a pop art feel to it with bright backgrounds and detailed attention to story. Rapp said she wanted the exhibition to draw people into Arthur's world building, do justice to the commitment that she shows in her work and honor her vision.

Rapp said the exhibition has sparked a lot of conversations. During one walkthrough with the artists, a student who had recently transferred to LMU approached Rapp and one of her colleagues. He explained that he was autistic and that the exhibition was an amazing experience for him.

"I love this idea of people finding community with a show," Rapp said.

It's also been important to her to demonstrate that the art isn't great because it is created by someone with a disability. The art is worthy on its own without any sort of qualifier. She said the Tierra del Sol artists are selling their work. It is being collected and some of them are curators of shows.

One couple who came to the exhibition confessed to Rapp that they were expecting the work to be simplistic, but they had the opposite experience. The more they looked at the work, the more they were drawn in, the more that they saw.

Rapp said many of the artists in the show are inspired by pop culture, film, music and history. She pointed to one ceramist, Herod. He creates classical guitars based on those that belong to Hall of Fame guitar players.

“It’s an incredible display of miniatures,” Rapp said. “He has this amazing piece to commemorate Johnny Cash and apparently a letter Johnny Cash wrote to Santa Claus as lyrics.”

“Here Comes the Sun” is a hopeful statement expressing this contemporary moment where there is a greater acknowledgement and acceptance of historically marginalized communities such as those with disabilities — both in the world at large and in the art world specifically.

### **“Here Comes the Sun”**

**WHEN:** Through Saturday, March 25

**WHERE:** Laband Art Gallery, 1 LMU Drive, Los Angeles

**COST:** Free admission

**INFO:** 310-338-2880, <https://cfa.lmu.edu/labandgallery>