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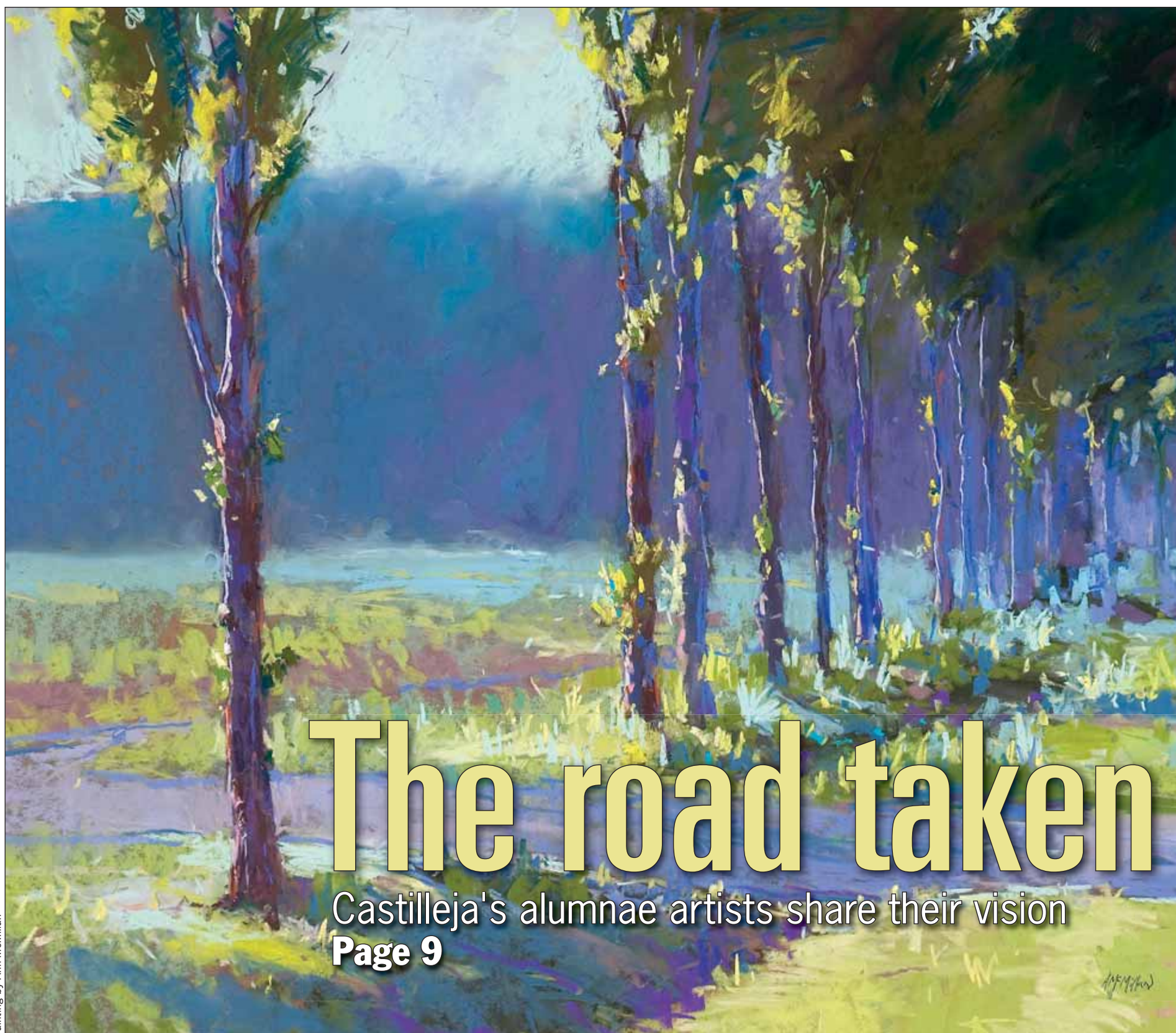
Weekly

Weekend Edition

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Arts & Entertainment

A weekly guide to music, theater, art, movies and more, edited by Rebecca Wallace



Susan Bradley



Susan Bradley

Liz Amini-Holmes is an illustrator who has worked in children's publishing, newspapers, multimedia and other venues. "It's a very viable place to be," she says of the art world.



Susan Bradley



Susan Bradley

Back to school

Castilleja alumnae artists return to exhibit their work — and to educate about career possibilities in the arts



graduates speak about what they've done with their lives, this exhibit makes for a particularly vivid Career Day. Artistic aspirations have grown into livelihoods, painted in watercolor and acrylic, pastel and photography.

"There's so many options out there for artists," said Liz Amini-Holmes, class of '79, an exhibiting illustrator who has worked in children's publishing, newspapers, magazines and multimedia. "It's a very viable place to be."

There will always be parents who balk at their children's choice of a creative field, imagining an artist in rags. Amini-Holmes' own mother, a pioneering scientific illustrator who graduated from medical school in the 1960s, would have preferred that her daughter become a lawyer.

"She didn't want me to go down that hard road," Amini-Holmes said.

But with this exhibit, Castilleja studio art teacher Deborah Trilling, director of the school's Anita Seipp Gallery, hopes to give par-

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From top to bottom: Ann McMillan with her triptych "Torch Song"; Eliza K. Jewett with her science illustrations; Liz Amini-Holmes' image "Dying" from her book "Winter Wolf."

by Rebecca Wallace
Eliza K. Jewett has built a successful career as a science illustrator and designer, but she hasn't forgotten her roots.

Prominent in her portfolio of botanical illustrations is an image of the bright-petaled woolly paint-

brush — a flower also called the Castilleja foliosa.

Jewett, who graduated from Castilleja School in 1992, is exhibiting this and other works at the Palo Alto school this spring as part of an alumnae art show. While every student has heard



Above left: Eliza K. Jewett's illustration of a red-shouldered hawk, a bird found in the Stanford foothills. Above: Asha Rawal's painting "Girl on a Play Horse."

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Back to school

(continued from previous page)

ents and students a taste of the career paths that are possible in art. The show ranges from the late painter and etcher Jeanette Maxfield Lewis (class of '14) to 2006 graduate Suelyn Yu, who's now at Northwestern University and plans to go into product design.

Other artists in the show are: plein-air painter Shirley Arnott Pruitt (class of '52), photographer Claire K. Erlin ('59), realist Melinda Lomax Cootsona ('77), plein-air painter Ann McMillan ('92) and painter Asha Raval ('05).

While many schools place paramount importance on standardized tests, Trilling says she believes there's a growing awareness in the workplace of how important creative, right-brain skills are. She cites author Daniel Pink, whose 2005 book "A Whole New Mind" makes a case for right-brain thinking. He calls the M.F.A. the "new M.B.A.," Trilling said with a grin.

"A lot of the jobs that have to do with engineering ... (and other left-brain-focused work) will be outsourced," she said. "It's important for people to be creative, risk-takers."

Many college students with a love for art mix it with something that seems more practical. Jewett, for instance, always enjoyed drawing, painting and writing about nature, but majored in biology at Harvard University.

Later, she worked as a biology researcher and a copy editor; it was a stint as art director of a CD-ROM about conservation that started her mingling science and art. She discovered the American Society of Botanical Artists and decided to earn a graduate certificate in science illustration from the University of California at Santa Cruz.

Now Jewett, a Palo Alto resident, does digital art four days a week

for Annual Reviews, which publishes critical reviews written by scientists in the biomedical, life, physical and social sciences. Jewett's work includes editing and improving figures to go with articles. The other day, she refined a figure showing how bacteria invade plant cells, which tied into her lifelong interest in plants.

In her other time, Jewett enjoys immersing herself in her botanical illustrations in watercolor and colored pencil, with careful attention to detail and scientific accuracy. Her many freelance illustration projects have included depicting 70 plant and animal species for a U.C. Santa Cruz campus guide. The images of plants and animals on exhibit at Castilleja are so detailed that Jewett jokes about hanging a magnifying glass nearby.

"There had been this sort of artificial separation in my mind — in society's mind — of art and science. But you can combine them," Jewett said. Much of what we learn about science, she said, comes from artists' visuals, such as drawings of cells.

Botanical illustrators' pictures of every leaf and petal can feel as though they're from another era, a cabinet of wonders from long before the digital age. But Jewett says there's still a place for this art. An illustration, for example, can show every facet of a plant clearly, while a photo might not be able to keep it all in focus.

Jewett also said the interest of prominent art collector Shirley Sherwood has raised the profile of botanical art in recent years. Exhibitions from Sherwood's collection have been at museums including the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, and a gallery named after her is set to open this month at Kew Gardens in Britain.

Ann McMillan, also exhibiting at Castilleja, has a science background, too; she holds a degree in

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biology and environmental studies from U.C. Santa Cruz. She did biology fieldwork after graduation, working as a birder in Yosemite National Park. In her off hours, she painted outside.

Back in the Bay Area, McMillan took art classes and worked in labs, until finally, four years ago, she chose to focus on painting. "My art life had become what I was really doing and what I was really thinking about," she said.

McMillan, who lives in Mountain View, is now a full-time artist with space at Cubberley Studios in Palo Alto. Understandably, her schedule has changed with the recent birth of her first child. Before that, a typical day would often be filled with painting outdoors, alone or in the company of other artists.

Favorite locations include Bolinas, which inspired the bright painting "Cottonwoods" in the Castilleja exhibit, and Yosemite, where her triptych "Torch Song" came from. It's a light-filled abstract in shades of blue and gold, a painting that she calls "an experiment gone right."

When McMillan's not painting, she's focusing on the business of art, which many artists see as a necessary evil. It's hard to be a working artist without keeping records, ordering frames and supplies, pitching your work to galleries, and so on.

"The idea is to get good enough so you have an assistant who does that (the promotional work) for you," McMillan said, adding with a smile, "or a spouse."

While traditional styles have an ongoing appeal, technology has also brought many new opportunities for artists, including animation and other work in the entertainment and educational worlds.

Illustrator Liz Amini-Holmes has been a full-time artist ever since graduating from college. She's done multimedia projects for an educational company, worked in computer games, and been a creative director.

More recently, Amini-Holmes, who lives in Woodside, has been focusing on her acrylic painting. She particularly enjoys working in publishing and for newspapers; she

has a penchant for deadlines.

As seen in the Castilleja exhibit, her personal style is filled with emotion and faces, with a dreaminess that calls to mind Marc Chagall (a comparison she enjoys). She's also influenced by the Symbolist painters and Polish poster art.

Amini-Holmes has done a lot of illustrating for trade books such as poetry compilations, but she has yet to sell her own mass-market book, a children's tale called "Winter Wolf" that she wrote and illustrated.

Paintings from "Winter Wolf" feature prominently in the exhibit, including "Dying," in which the book's main character, Roxhana, embraces a pale wolf in the snowy woods. The myth-like story focuses on the girl and the wolf: The wolf brings death and winter to a Persian village, while the girl symbolizes sunshine and summer.

Amini-Holmes is sanguine about the rejection letters she's received in this competitive field.

"Unfortunately, everyone thinks they can write a children's book,"

she said, laughing and vowing to continue shopping her book around. "You have to really persevere." ■

What: An alumnae art show at Castilleja School, featuring professional artists and recent graduates

Where: Anita Seipp Gallery, 1310 Bryant St., Palo Alto

When: Through May 9 (closed April 14-April 18). Open weekdays from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. or by appointment.

Cost: Free

Info: Call 650-328-3160, extension 7878. To make an appointment to see the show, email deborah_trilling@castilleja.org.

About the cover:

Ann McMillan painted "Cottonwoods" outside in Bolinas. It's part of the current alumnae art show at Castilleja School's Anita Seipp Gallery.

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