

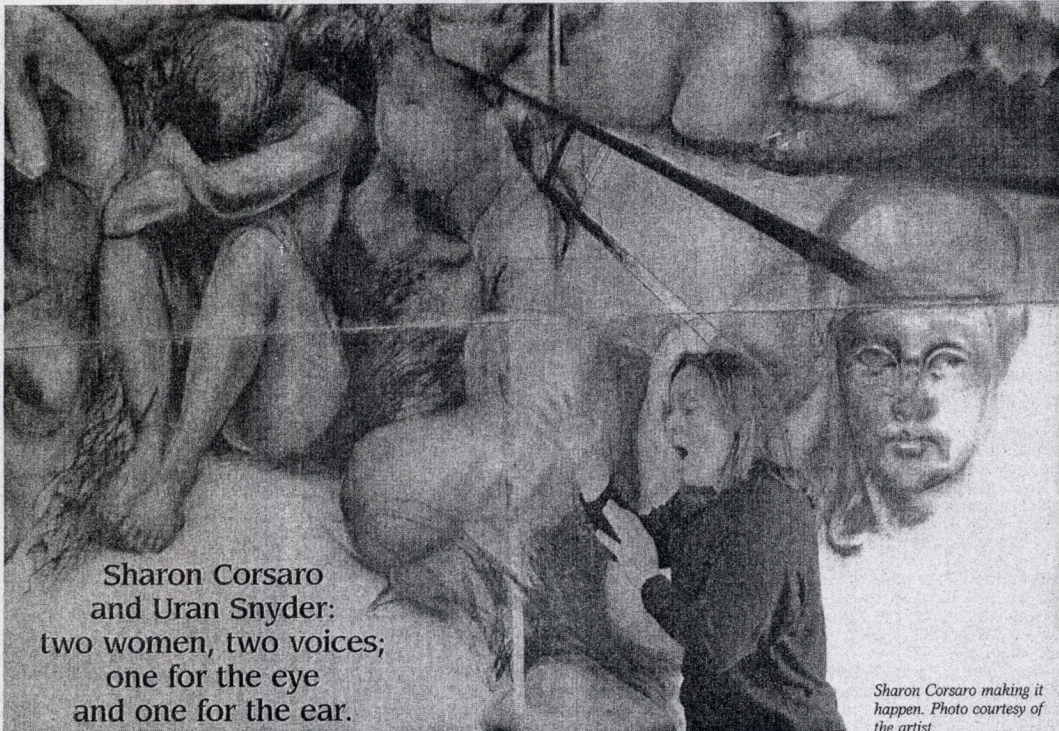
Easy Reader

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ENTERTAINMENT AND DINING IN THE SOUTH BAY

What Stirs Within



Sharon Corsaro and Uran Snyder: two women, two voices; one for the eye and one for the ear.

Sharon Corsaro making it happen. Photo courtesy of the artist.

by Bondo Wyszpolski

The Walls of Gallery A at The Loft in San Pedro are filled with just five pieces, each one peopled by larger than life figures in charcoal, and they're all singing, but very low. One work has a wingspan of 33.9 feet, stands nine feet tall, and is called "Circling." The bodies are stationary but the effect is of forms writhing, swirling, touching but untouched. One may think of Dante's *Inferno* or Picasso's *Guernica* in a setting that also has the solemnity of the Rothko Chapel in Houston.

But this is just one component of *Giving Voice to Vision*, a collaborative endeavor by the visual artist Uran Snyder and vocal expressionist (plus Hermosa Beach resident) Sharon Corsaro. The exhibition opens this evening with a reception from 6 to 9 p.m., and a live performance is scheduled for 7:30.

Corsaro has selected one piece, "Cinderella Dream," and she will enter into the spirit of the work and become the vehicle that lets it speak. I've had a "taste," as she calls it, of what it is exactly that she does, and was quite moved; and the hours that have gone into what you're about to read are testimony to that. It was only fitting to speak with both of the collaborators, as one aspect of the presentation could not really exist without the other.

The three of us, plus Loft coordinator Annemarie Rawlinson, are standing in the quiet, open space of the old building, although Snyder and Rawlinson will momentarily leave when Corsaro gives her demonstration. In the meantime, I turn to Corsaro and I ask:

How is it that you chose this one in particular?

"I didn't actually choose the piece; the piece chose me."

I don't say anything, but I could give a similar reply if asked why I was there to speak with them.

"What I do is I merge with the piece and I vocalize it," Corsaro says. "More than my voice, it is my *body, my being*; so I become it, and I express it. I do that with a group of people, I do that with a person's body, I do that with a mountain, I do that with a globe." She pauses. "I become the voice of this piece, and I present it through me."

The impression is a bit like speaking with a psychic medium. Which is what most artists are, to some degree, so I'm comfortable with that.

"In any art, there is a spirit, right? There's an essence that is expressed. This is Uran's expression and energy, a concept, a piece of something that we deal with in life. And when art does a really good job of expressing the energy of something, it's then read by everyone differently. Right? Just like how, in writing, there's a voice, there's a spirit of the piece that's there, and it speaks differently to everyone. In this case, there's an essence that is there, a living force that's part of this, and each person that connects with this is going to see or feel different things.

"So," she continues, "when I do what I'm doing with this piece I'm stepping into that energy. I'm stepping into the spirit of it, and expressing it in my modality, adding to the visual modality. In this there are two modalities of the same energy happening at the same time. Does that make sense? So I am being *this* while it is also being with art on paper. For the person viewing that, it's like a multi-dimensional experience of the energy of it. I bring it to life. Through my modality it's right here, it's alive, it's three-dimensional."

Now, hold those thoughts while we talk to Uran Snyder.

How did these works come out of you, and why in this manner of expression?

"Whatever you do is a self-portrait," Snyder replies, "and the time I was making these was

about the same time I was raising my children, and wanting to share so much, but you have to wait until they grow up to teach [them] certain things... You can't just give everything you have to young kids. You really have to go through the pain yourself to learn, and I was very frustrated.

"I was thinking of the cycling and circling of human life, and that was the main thought. So this is about non-communication, discommunication of society, that people are really looking for something all the time. They have people around them, but they don't try to look at each other, but [are] looking for some idea. You can see that. Even the only ones literally connecting, a man and a woman" - this is a picture adjacent to "Cinderella Dream" - "are not looking at each other; they are looking someplace else." She points. "This [person] is just walking through the other one. It was a lot about loneliness in a crowded society."

Even in the midst of other people there is still isolation, alienation.

"And always looking for something else," Snyder continues. "This guy is looking at you, but then," she pauses, with a faint smile on her lips, "he's just a drawing."

We turn towards "Cinderella Dream."

"Because of the smallness of my studio, I only had a six-foot-wide space." As Snyder describes how she would work on one segment, roll it up and roll out another section to work on, I think of the long scroll-like pictures of Henry Darger that were also completed in a confined space. After all, an artist needs to be economical and inventive.

When Snyder began the piece she had just one image in mind, what looks to me like the head of a Buddha. "But I didn't have all this in mind," she says, indicating everything to the left of the paper that emerged later.

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Songograms

Vocal expressionist Sharon Corsaro of Hermosa joins artist Uran Snyder in "Giving Voice to Vision," which opens tonight at The Walls of Gallery A at The Loft in San Pedro. Story page 39



Vocalist Sharon Corsaro and artist Uran Snyder. Photo by Bondo Wyszpolski.

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"It was a mystery to me, in a way. I don't use sketches; it's direct and I don't know what's going to happen next." In other words, each figure led to - or called up - the next.

When were these done?

"More than twenty years ago."

So you've had these...

"Stashed... For a long time."

The reason we're seeing them now is at least in part the responsibility of a grade school friend named Koji, who came by to visit and then asked Snyder about her art. So she showed him "Cinderella Dreaming." I can only guess that Koji's response was one of astonishment. According to the artist, he said: "What are you doing letting her sleep? It's time to get her out."

"The reason I am in the visual arts," Snyder explains, "is because I felt the limitations in communication with words. I was a language major before... So I was thinking, I want them [the pictures] to tell the story but I cannot use words."

Snyder had known Corsaro for several years, and they'd reconnected about a year ago when Corsaro returned from travels abroad and beyond. Snyder remembered Corsaro's vocal work, the fact that "she doesn't use words, she uses sounds. And I thought that would be just perfect. She can be representing them in sound and we'll see what happens. We don't know." Snyder laughs softly. "We really don't know."

As for Corsaro, "Uran shared her work with me, and I was pretty well taken."

First, there is these women's rational interpretation of "Cinderella Dreaming," which of course must form some kind of springboard for when Corsaro enters into the spirit of the work and vocalizes it.

Snyder says that, historically, women have waited for Prince Charming to come and rescue them. I interrupt, with more melancholy than either can imagine. And they still do, right? [fairy tales are sad truths, from the male perspective as well]. Snyder points out that the last figure is not only walking on her own but walking out of the picture. What is symbolized is women's independence from men, but walking alone for too long is not - let's face it - independence; it's loneliness. Well, of course; and Snyder indicates that the woman (we hope) is about to walk hand in hand with a man and thus form a wholeness or unity.

Corsaro adds that it's thus about empowerment. "A woman being empowered means a man is empowered as well."

Personally, I cringe at the word "empowerment." I like the soft-focus words balance, harmony, union.

"So that's the message now," Snyder says. And then she points to something I hadn't consciously noticed: the far left side of the piece is still rolled up, and there's no way to know what's hidden under or behind it.

It was, Snyder says, "intentionally done that way because there are more stories coming... That's the 'yet untold' part." It's an effective flourish.

Let's go back to Corsaro telling me about just what it is she does.

Tell me, I say, does it distract you to have the other works close by? Because when you're responding to one, well, all of them are somehow involved.

"That's a very good perception," Corsaro replies. "Back to the spontaneity of this, it isn't rehearsed or pre-conceived, except that ever since we've planned this I've been living this body of work. It's like I'm wearing it, I'm being it, and when I step into it there's something there that I don't even know. Truly."

"As to your question of distraction," she continues, "I step into this, so I'm focused right here. My work is what I now call VocalArt; it is giving a voice to whatever is the focus. In this case, this is the focus, and that's what I step into to vocalize. If I switch over here" - and she indicates another picture - "there's a whole different energy going on. If I step into it, and vocalize it, it would sound different."

Even so, I say, I would imagine that there would be a certain similarity with these works [as they're by the same hand] as opposed to the work of another artist whose approach or vision is completely different.

"When I do what I do," Corsaro answers, "there's a *similarness* no matter what I'm connecting to. It's like I'm an instrument. I am *one* instrument. Some other person is a different instrument, and they key in on the same spirit in a song, and play that song. They sound differently."

And the audience makes a difference.

"Just like you said, it's an engagement with everything... Everything has a small influence."

Snyder and Rawlinson have left the room, and now I'm about to be initiated. Part of me, like Perseus, wonders if he'll be turned to stone by something Medusa-like. Another part of me, Ulysses bound to the mast, wonders if the Sirens' song will drive him mad.

The "taste" is short, only a minute or two (the full-scale piece can go half an hour), and sure enough I'm turned to stone and driven mad. Just my luck. What seems to come out of the pictures and out of Corsaro is part howl, wail, lament, shriek, silence, cry, gale force wind, chant, deep sigh, mourning or moaning, and a one-person vocal choir. It unspools out of her, just as the drawing must have unspooled out of Snyder, proving that women, like spiders, can spin webs using material from within.

Afterwards, Corsaro tells me that what came out was very different than what emerged the other day for somebody else. Her eyes seem to glow and her face lights up, so I assume this is meant as a compliment.

"It is almost like a 'present moment' engaging of this voice," she says, "the voice of this piece, with who is here. I feel that, just now saying it. It's sort of how I said this piece chose me. This piece has a life of its own; as they all do. But this piece sort of found me, and it found its opportunity to share in such a grand way its voice. And that voice has different things to say to different people."

Yes, because we bring to it our history or language, or our cultural appreciation and knowledge of the arts, both visually and aurally.

"This hasn't been done before," Corsaro says, referring to the nature of the collaboration. "With this it's been elongated over a period of

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time, preparing it, and then giving people 'a taste.' This is a very different thing for me, with my art to connect into it, continually, and then experience that it comes out differently. I said to someone the other day, what I do is like a painting; you make that brushstroke and it's done. I made my voice, it is a brushstroke into the air, and it's done. The next time I stroke the brush it's going to be different."

However, "Uran said, Sharon, it's more like you're sculpting, because it's so round, it's so full. I thought, yeah, it's like sculpting, it's like carving. If I had a raw piece of wood and I carve it into something beautiful."

Well, you're carving something into the space, like skywriting. One of my responses to your demonstration was that it sounded like a one-person choir, and this space must have made a difference, as it always would.

"My voice has developed purely through my work. My work is a very private, very sacred thing, really... I don't have to have people know that it's a very sacred thing. They can just receive it, and they take it and they are affected."

If they are attuned or receptive they'll recognize it, I tell her.

"And that is why I'm doing the workshop in here [Note: see below]; for those who recognize there's something there and want to learn about it, I'm happy to share it."

Of course, with any audience that an artist has, some of that audience will not be able to... "...consciously engage with it," Corsaro interjects.

...and it'll just pass through them. But for others, even if it's a small number of people, there'll be that connection. That's who you're doing it for, really. Basically for kindred spirits."

She laughs. "I think you being one!"

You never know.

I'm going to let Uran Snyder - and her artwork - have the last word.

How old were you when you did these?

"In my mid-30s," Snyder replies.

If you were to do them twenty years later, would they be similar?

"I have no idea. See, I have to start, to know." Referring to "Cinderella Dream," she says, "I didn't know how this would come out when I did it."

As for influences, Snyder doesn't name any, but says she was studying baroque and mannerism when she created these art pieces. There is, however, a noticeable Asian influence (Snyder is originally from Tokyo) in the largest work, "Circling," namely in what appears to be Chinese or Japanese ideograms but really aren't. Again it's about apparent but not authentic communication.

Back then, Snyder adds, "I was really against message art. I was saying, Well, I like to draw bodies, and they are just beautiful in themselves, so I don't have to give any messages."

"And then I did this, I looked at them and said, *Hey, it says something.*"

You still create art on a regular basis?

"Yes, I do."

But something quite different?

"I paint, still large - but all nature."

Going from these figures to nature is...

"Well, actually I like rocks, large rocks, and they are very much like bodies." There's a pause. "Basically, I really don't like to talk about it."

Then we won't. Your works speak for themselves. Eloquently.

Giving Voice to Vision opens this evening and will be on display through March 25 in The Loft Galleries, 401 South Mesa, San Pedro. The reception takes place tonight (It's the First Thursday Art Walk, with other galleries nearby) from 6 to 9 p.m., and there will be a live performance at 7:30. It's free, just walk in (before, not during). On Sunday, March 12, from 2 to 5 p.m., there is a "Meet the Artists" VocalArt Intro Workshop. This is an open invite, no fee. On Saturday, March 18, from 2 to 5 p.m., there is a private reception - with a performance at 3:30 - with personal guests from the arts and media. If you're one of the latter, then call Note to educators and teachers: Both artists will make themselves available to art student groups or classes. Private viewings can also be requested. Uran Snyder can be reached at (562) 422-7711, and Sharon Corsaro at (310) 991-1998. One can also go to the-loft.net or to thevoiceofvision.com. ER