ART STUDIO

Looking back on a year’s conversations in the arts

The year 2014 has been an interesting one covering the arts for the Sentinel. Over the year, I have had the privilege to cover a range of topics making a big impact on the arts in Santa Cruz County. Here is a look back at a few of those conversations:

The Student Success Act is a bill that gives states more control over their own education systems. The bill focuses on basic skills, career preparation and transfer credits stipulating that once a student has completed a class they cannot repeat it. Cabrillo College, where the issues of repeatability and lifelong learning continue to be examined, remains one of the top ranked community colleges in the state, continuing to pioneer higher education in the arts.

I spoke with artist Dawn Nakanishi, art studio instructor at Cabrillo College since 1997. Dawn has been working with a group of Cabrillo staff and the State Board of Governors to help make the discretion of repeatability the choice of local community colleges.

Dawn Nakanishi: “I serve on the sabbatical leave board and am always amazed by the faculty of our art department, sciences and English, etc. I read the proposals of our teaching staff going on sabbatical and I have been blown away by their proposed projects. It is such an extraordinary group of people that teach here and makes Cabrillo such a special place for students to learn. I am always humbled when I read their proposals.”

Aerial dance, with roots in San Francisco, grew in Santa Cruz in 2014. Dancer and fitness instructor Jeanette Bent opened Aerial Arts Santa Cruz, at the Wrigley Building for students to learn aerial dance. I spoke with dancer Allie Cooper, manager of Aerial Arts Santa Cruz studio who helps young aspiring dancers learn to fly.

Allie Cooper: “Because it is hard to find spaces that the ceilings are high enough to create the rigging, this large commercial space was perfect. Last October Jeanette Bent came in and brought Aerial Arts Santa Cruz into the space. We have children starting at 7 years old and this year we have an amazing group of 10- and 11-year-old athletic performers that are incredible, constantly surprising and inspiring us.”

Steinbeck, Miller, Jefferson, Stevenson are just a few of the literary giants that have called the Central Coast home.

This year Catamaran Literary Reader launched the first annual Catamaran Writing Conference. I spoke with Catherine Segurson branchchild of Catamaran Literary Reader who launched the Santa Cruz-based literary journal three years ago. The conference was hosted by the Stevenson School at Pebble Beach, and taps into the rich literary history of the Central Coast.

Catherine Segurson: “I have attended writing conferences in places like Italy, Prague, Slovenia as well as here in the States in Napa, San Francisco, Rhode Island. So I have experienced the conference format and, as well and put together two conferences in ‘Tuscany. I learned through those experiences the value of combining the time spent learning and the time interacting with your surroundings. Launching the magazine two years ago, a conference around the magazine gave people an opportunity to interact with the writers and editors providing a greater experience for everyone.”

I spoke with comedian DNA who moved to Santa Cruz in 2004. At the Blue Lagoon he has been hosting headliners from around the country every Thursday for the last seven years. In 2013 DNA told me that Santa Cruz was not a comedy town and yet in the last 18 months he has successfully brought comedy to venues throughout the county earning him the title “the underground comedy czar of Santa Cruz.”

DNA: “Comedy is a way for people to talk about their problems and therapy is expensive. So there’s that. At it’s best it can be very cathartic and I think an audience can really go through a transformation with laughter that’s very positive. It becomes a thing here. It used to be the thing was poetry slams. And then everyone was doing karaoke and now comedy is the thing.”

In Monterey, I spoke with Arts Habitat administrator Shirmaaine Jones about “This Business Called Art,” her organization’s newest initiative at Fort Ord where it has hosted the popular Arts in Progress since 2009. The program encourages appreciation of art in Monterey.

Shirmaaine Jones: “We are interested in ways of helping local artists and it is part of our ongoing mission to collaborate with other organizations. This year we worked with Charlotte Eyerman of the Monterey Museum of Art on ‘This Business Called Art.’ Along with the panel discussions we have been able to offer several workshops that go into more depth about the business of art.”

Kirby Scudder is the director of the Santa Cruz Institute of Contemporary Art.