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Datebook

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ART

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Painter unlocks doors with 'keys to kingdom'

Rogers finds inspiration, exposure for vibrant works after studying with greats

By Julian Guthrie

Matt Rogers stood in front of one of his large-format oil paintings — showing the lower legs and hooves of charging horses — and said he had to learn to “celebrate the chaos of the moment and let the movement take you.”

When Rogers, born in Oakland and now living in St. Helena, did his first horse painting as a commission a decade ago, he wanted to do something that was “clean and exact.” But when he started thinking about “Where is the energy coming from?” and “Where is the gesture?,” the process became “a big physical exercise, with big brushstrokes to capture the drumbeat of the animal.”

Rogers, 45, has eight of his horse paintings — and 13 landscapes — in a solo exhibition at the Caldwell Snyder Gallery off Union Square in San Francisco. Walking through the gallery, Rogers talked about his influences, from his

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Caldwell Snyder Gallery

“Hoof Cadence 2” is one of eight horse paintings Rogers has on display at the Caldwell Snyder Gallery in San Francisco.

To learn more

An exhibition of Matt Rogers' paintings at the Caldwell Snyder Gallery, 341 Sutter St., in San Francisco, will be on view through April. For information: www.caldwellsnyder.com.

To see a short video of Rogers discussing his work, go to www.sfgate.com/news/item/Matt-Rogers-28111.php

Artist walked through fairs with Thiebauds

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fourth-grade teacher who gave him his first paintbrush to a high school educator who encouraged him to treat art as a viable profession.

His grandfather, William Kingwell Tuck, was an engineer who became an artist at age 75, and his father, Gary Rogers, was the CEO who turned Dreyer's Grand Ice Cream into a household name.

Bay Area mentors

The younger Rogers also talked about the mentors he had in Bay Area artists Wayne Thiebaud and Chris Brown, and encounters with other artists including Nathan Oliveira, Manuel Neri and Stephen De Staebler.

“I was looking for a job and went to the Campbell-Thiebaud Gallery,” Rogers said. “I got the job and worked for Paul Thiebaud

(Wayne's son) for five years, and it was like being handed the keys to the kingdom.”

He suddenly found himself in the same room with the greats he had studied at the Art Institute. As a part of his job, he would head to De Staebler's studio to pick up sculpture or Oliveira's to retrieve paintings. He got to walk through art fairs with the Thiebauds and Brown, analyzing the works as they went.

“These were my heroes,” Rogers said. “I had one great day where I brought 25 of my paintings to Wayne's studio in Sacramento and he went through and critiqued them.”

Walking from the front of the gallery, with the horse paintings, Rogers said some of the works have a “softness” to them while others create a challenge to the viewer. His process is to load one easel in his studio with magazine

images of horses and set his canvas on an adjacent easel.

“I start with the images and fold them in half,” he said. “In art school, you are taught to take something, pull it apart and dissect it. I'd then draw on the canvas in pencil or chalk. I start with black and then bring in white.”

The draw of music

Gesturing to a painting called “Strike Line,” he said, “This is a jazz painting.” Then, pointing to a large work titled “Winter Duel,” he said, “This is Metallica.” He was referring to the different types of music he listened to while creating the paintings.

Heading through the landscape section of the exhibition, Rogers said, “This is like a California road trip, where you go from the beach to the mountains.”

There are stops in San Francisco, Stinson, Boli-



Caldwell Snyder Gallery

“Hillside Rain 2” by St. Helena painter Matt Rogers brings to mind the question posed as a storm looms: What will nature usher in?

nas and the Wine Country. There are small images within the paintings that speak to his wife and their first home in San Francisco; to his three daughters; and to fire trucks (his family home burned down in the Oakland hills fire).

And there are images reminiscent of his mentor and friend, Wayne Thiebaud.

“This profession is not the easiest path to pick,” Rogers said. “But it's something I really love. There are so many things to explore, and so many

wonderful people involved. It's a joy, and I feel like I'm just beginning.”

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