

Judy Foreman: Kenton Nelson Gets More Than a Day at the Beach

Caldwell Snyder Gallery makes the most of its inaugural art reception to feature a bold painter with Montecito roots



Painter and muralist Kenton Nelson, with Carin Gerard and his "Summer Pallet" looking over his shoulder, was the featured artist at the Caldwell Snyder Gallery's debut reception in Montecito. (CarinGerard.com photo)

By Judy Foreman, Noozhawk Columnist | [@noozhawknews](https://www.noozhawknews.com)

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One of my best decisions as a landlord was to lease space to [Caldwell Snyder Gallery](https://www.caldwellsnydergallery.com). During the middle of the [COVID-19](https://www.cdc.gov/covid19) crisis, we both took a chance and it appears to have been a good move.

Last fall, the Montecito gallery soft-opened its remodeled, 1000-square-foot space at 1266 Coast Village Road. Even without fanfare, locals and tourists found it.

Co-founders [Oliver Caldwell and Susan Snyder](#) opened their first gallery in 1983 on Sutter Street in San Francisco's Downtown-Union Square neighborhood, and later added a second in St. Helena.

Caldwell Snyder specializes in the exhibition and sale of contemporary American, European and Latin American paintings, drawings and sculptures. The gallery's first art reception in Montecito — for [Kenton Nelson](#), a bold, contemporary American painter and muralist who grew up locally — did not disappoint.

As bartenders poured wine and waiters from [Duo Catering & Events](#) circulated with delicious edibles, patrons moseyed around the gallery or gathered outside at high-top tables adjacent to artist [Brad Howe's](#) recent installation of his towering steel sculpture.

Nelson's large, stylized, brightly colored and uplifting paintings seemed to be the perfect choice for these challenging times and added to the celebratory atmosphere. No one was in a hurry to leave, and laughter and good cheer were abundant.

Running through June 10, Nelson's exhibition features his ["A Day at the Beach" collection](#).

"The collection of paintings is based on social idealism and bucolic memories of my youth, living in Montecito," he said. "Our neighbors were beatniks and farmers, and I remember vast summer lawns, barefoot days and Butterfly Beach.

"It's the first place I heard [Dizzy Gillespie](#) and first time I watched a man make a painting."

Nelson traces his interest in painting to his great uncle, [Roberto Montenegro](#), a renowned Mexican muralist and Modernist.

Gallery manager Jennifer McCloskey said Nelson is known for painting his figures, landscapes and architecture bathed in light.

"The objective," she said, "is to idealize the ordinary with the intention of engagement, using the iconic symbols and styles of his lifetime in a theatrical style to make leading suggestions.

"His oil paintings of figures and objects and architecture resurrected the sun-drenched optimism of [New Deal](#) paintings that he was greatly influenced by."

With the late afternoon sun picking up Nelson's thematic style and bathing the gallery in light, I, too, found my optimism and hopefulness resurrected.

“Bringing people back and fighting against another major enemy of 2020, hibernation, we are happy to finally introduce Caldwell Snyder,” Caldwell said. “Together It felt good to think about the future that seems right around the corner.”

— Judy Foreman is a [*Noozhawk*](#) columnist and longtime local writer and lifestyles observer. She can be contacted at news@noozhawk.com. [Click here for previous columns](#).



Susan Snyder and Oliver Caldwell opened their Caldwell Snyder Gallery — the couple’s third — last fall at 1266 Coast Village Road in Montecito. (Judy Foreman / Noozhawk photo)



Kenton Nelson is known for painting his figures, landscapes and architecture bathed in light. (Caldwell Snyder Gallery photo)



Sculptor Brad Howe with his installation outside the Caldwell Snyder Gallery. (Judy Foreman / Noozhawk photo)