



STORIED PAST

BY MARIA GRUSAUSKAS

NUMU Opens Rotating History Exhibit 'Los Gatos Gallery'

As with most towns with roots in the Old West, the history of Los Gatos is rich—so rich that it will drive a year-long exhibit at NUMU. The Los Gatos Gallery, which will be constantly changing and evolving throughout the year, opened in early November and runs through October 2018.

On the day *Los Gatos Magazine* caught up with NUMU History Curator Amy Long, she was digging through boxes of old photographs, unearthing century-old gems from a time when photographic subjects had to hold still for 10 minutes or more. When it comes to telling Los Gatos' layered history, Long is at no loss for material: the exhibit draws on NUMU's collection of historical objects and ephemera, historical artifacts lent by Los Gatos residents, and its partnership with the Los Gatos Library History Room's extensive collection of documents, texts and photographs.

But rather than present the stories of Los Gatos' past in a timeline-style exhibit, Long wanted to create an ever-changing rotation. "So every time someone comes back they'll see something new," says Long.

The one constant in the Los Gatos Gallery is the "Origins and Beginnings" component, which tells the story of the original inhabitants of the area, the Ohlone, and the first settlers who started pouring into the area before it became an incorporated town in 1887—the same year the South Pacific Railroad took over

the railroad line that ran from Alameda to Santa Cruz, stopping in Los Gatos.

Long, who has been with the museum for four years now, is intrigued by the layers and connections she's found in Los Gatos heritage.

"There will be no hard lines," says Long of the interconnecting themes that the exhibit spans, which include Agriculture and Industry, Artists and Activists, Innovation, and Community. "We have a highlight wall that features different focus topics that we'll pull out, be it a single business, or something very interesting about a person or event," she says.

Long says that her goal as a curator is to draw parallels between the Los Gatos history and its present identity. These parallels can be seen in tracing Los Gatos' historically fertile agricultural harvest to its more recent harvesting of ideas in Silicon Valley. Or, take the invention of the Pet Rock in 1975 by Los Gatos resident Gary Dahl. "The idea came out of a bar in Los Gatos," says Long, "and that Pet Rock is taught in marketing books as one of the earliest marketing products to go viral pre-internet." Dahl, who

Olivia de Havilland with Frank Ingerson and George Dennison, in the couple's home.



New Museum Los Gatos Collection



New Museum Los Gatos Collection

Spanish dancer costumes are from one of the pageants, 1930s.

died in 2015, used his Pet Rock money (about \$1.5 million) to open the Los Gatos bar Carry Nations, which he ran for two years. “There are so many innovations that came out of this area,” says Long.

But perhaps the most interesting stories pivot around the colorful citizens who called Los Gatos home and helped shape Los Gatos with their businesses and art.

“There was a really interesting network of artists and writers and people in the film industry that were all attracted to this area and lived here in the mid-20th century, and all kind of knew each other because it was a small town,” says Long. Like Frank Ingerson and George Dennison: “They lived together. They were partners in love, life and art. And it was not easy to be gay back then. They were designers and artists and craftsmen,” Long says of the couple, who had an estate at the base of the mountains, and were friends with actress Olivia de Havilland (*Gone With the Wind*) and her sister Joan Fontaine, who went to Los Gatos High School and actually became archenemies later in life. Another friend, renowned violinist Yehudi

Menuhin, will also make a cameo in the exhibit.

And what about the role of saloons and brothels? Oh, yes, like all Old Western towns, Los Gatos has a vibrant history of those, too, which Long has researched extensively, and which she will incorporate into the Gallery, as well.

Pulling it all together are the murals of multi-media muralist Andrea Borsuk. In addition to the Ming Quong orphanage mural, Borsuk has completed a series of background murals using Los Gatos photographs and ephemera, which will serve as a backdrop to the objects and text. “It’s definitely a history gallery,” says Long, “but we are integrating the art to help tell the stories.”

The Los Gatos Gallery exhibit runs through Oct. 31, 2018 at NUMU, 106 E. Main St, Los Gatos. Open from 1-5pm Wednesday, 11am-8pm Thursday, and 11am-5pm Saturday and Sunday. General admission \$10/\$6 for seniors, military and students. Free for members and visitors under 18. numulosgatos.org. ♦