

jessica pisano

MIXED MEDIA ARTIST



BY DONNA SCAGLIONE

As Jessica Pisano finished her most recent work—a series of mixed-media pieces with painted photos of butterflies varnished over Italian tile and affixed to salvaged tin ceiling panels and barn boards—she experienced an “aha moment.” Such a moment is the point in the artistic process when everything comes together, when a piece becomes whole and can finally stand on its own or as part of a series. “It’s got all these great elements that give me a feeling of completion,” she says of the series. Viewing the pieces is a tactile experience: the viewer wants to touch what look like real butterflies, run their fingertips across the imprint on the ceiling panels, or check for splinters on the old barn boards.

Much of Pisano’s work involves painting on black-and-white photographs with acrylics, gold leaf, oils, or watercolors, and mixing the photos with recycled materials. It is a look she terms “rustic refined.” Further, she eschews glass coverings, thus eliminating any barrier between the art and the observer. “The texture is right out there,” says the 30-year-old artist.

Pisano studied photography and painting at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon, and spent her junior year at Lorenzo de’ Medici, an art school in Florence, Italy. The granddaughter of a sculptor and daughter of a graphic designer, film producer, and writer, Pisano learned early on that creative life can be financially difficult. To broaden her palette, she earned a master’s degree in arts administration from the Art Institute of Chicago. “If I was going to be an artist, I really wanted to have the business mindset,” says Pisano.

You might say that her work with the Belushi Pisano Gallery in Vineyard Haven has been the

result of another “aha moment.” Pisano’s roles as gallery founder, director, and exhibitor unite her creativity and business acumen, balancing the solitary work of an artist with the social demands of operating a gallery. Although the gallery is run like a commercial gallery, once expenses are paid, the rest of the gallery’s earnings are given to the Second Chance Foundation, which provides grants to needy individuals and organizations on the Vineyard. The foundation was originally funded through the sale of late comedian John Belushi’s memorabilia by his widow, Judy Belushi Pisano, Jessica Pisano’s stepmother. Pisano presented the idea of



Cala Lily

Mariposa Prima



Orchid Abstract



Orchidea Gold

the not-for-profit gallery to her stepmother and father through a formal business proposal. The gallery opened in late 2005, making this summer its third high season.

As she shows a visitor around the space, Pisano appears energized by the glass sculptures, paintings, and color photography from some 25 artists that surround her. Traveling to galleries and museums far-flung from Vineyard shores to study the artwork of others helps Pisano choose work to exhibit. For Pisano, who also exhibits her work at the Harvest Gallery in Dennis, exposure to other artists feeds her desire to create. “Something about being in those environments gives me the surge of productivity.”

Jessica Pisano’s work can be seen in a solo show at the Belushi Pisano Gallery (www.belushipisano-gallery.com) on Martha’s Vineyard and in the current Songcatcher Show at Lark & Key Gallery in Charlotte, North Carolina.