

MARY PORTER  
**SESNON**  
ART GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Media Contact: Shelby Graham  
sgraham@ucsc.edu: 831.459.2314

Mary Porter Sesnon Art Gallery at UCSC presents:  
Mary Porter Sesnon & Pino Alto  
April 12 - May 12, 2018  
Opening Reception: Thursday, April 12, 5:00–7:00 p.m. with live music.



Curator and Alumni Walkthrough: Saturday, April 28, 2:00–4:00 p.m.  
with Sesnon Family Sign Dedication at 3 p.m.

Exhibition curated by Shelby Graham and UCSC students

SANTA CRUZ, CA – (March 12, 2018) The Sesnon Art Gallery at the University of California, Santa Cruz will hold an exhibition celebrating the life of Mary Porter Sesnon (1868-1930) and her influence on the arts in Santa Cruz County.

Born in Soquel, CA, in 1868 to Benjamin F. Porter and Kate Hubbard, Mary Sophia Porter was the sole survivor of three children. She spent her childhood in Soquel, before moving to Los Angeles and San Francisco. As a young woman, she traveled to Europe with her family and was tutored in music, arts appreciation and

civics. In 1890, her father built her a studio on the property, a place of solace for her throughout her life. She witnessed a changing California landscape in the late 1800s and married William T. Sesnon in 1896. Together they returned to her childhood property, where they built their summer home, Pino Alto, and hosted cultural salons from 1911 to 1927. Pino Alto, named after a tall pine tree near the driveway, is now called the Sesnon House and serves as headquarters for the culinary arts program and restaurant for Cabrillo College in Aptos.

The exhibition contains many sketches and watercolors from an historic scrapbook made during these salons, calligraphy by Ms. Sesnon, along with paintings by California artists Will Sparks, Ferdinand Burgdorff, Haig Patigian, Frank Unger, Charles Dickman, Margaret Rogers, Leonora N. Penniman, and Cor de Gavere. The work of Ms. Sesnon's great-granddaughter, Molly Porter Cliff Hilts (Porter College '81), and other Sesnon family members is included in the exhibition. The exhibition places Ms. Sesnon at the center of it all, organizing creative salon-type parties that helped break down social and intellectual barriers and brought a variety of people together in new ways. These salons were gatherings that lasted for days. Guests included thespians, musicians, and dignitaries.

California historian and writer Geoffrey Dunn, who is contributing a catalog essay states, "While the family names Porter and Sesnon are sprinkled throughout Santa Cruz County and are familiar to anyone who has lived here for any length of time, their significant impact on regional history has been somewhat overlooked. In particular, Mary Porter Sesnon's contribution to the local art scene at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and well into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century has remained virtually unknown. This exhibition richly and lovingly helps to fill that void."

Curator Shelby Graham mentions, "This narrative has been brewing in my mind for the past twenty years as director of the Sesnon Gallery. Students at UC Santa Cruz are eager to hear this tale of bringing friends together to share art, stories, food and ideas that question the political climate of the time." To further reflect this, the gallery will host weekly salons for performance and discussion. Guests will be provided with paper and art supplies to create a scrapbook capturing the thoughts and images of today's political and cultural landscape, much in the same way as Mary Sesnon's scrapbook did.

Artists represented in the exhibition include early California painters, who attended the salons at Pino Alto. **Will Sparks** (1862-1937) was a painter known for his depictions of California missions. **Haig Patigian** (1876-1950) was a renowned Neoclassical sculptor. **Ferdinand Burgdorff** (1881-1975) was known for his works on coastal views. **Cornelia "Cor" de Gavere** (1877-1955), noted for her landscapes, was member of the "Santa Cruz 3," along with fellow artists, **Leonora N. Penniman** and **Margaret E. Rogers**. The work of other Sesnon family members will also be on display, including work by Mary Porter Sesnon's great-granddaughter, **Molly Porter Cliff Hilts** (Porter College '81). "My great-grandmother was a muse with a strong sense of community," reflects Molly, "she

loved to bring people together. These attributes resonate with, and echo, my own life's path.”

In tandem with this historical display, and enriching the sense of family tradition, Molly Cliff Hilts' recent encaustic paintings and larger-than-life drawings will be featured in the adjacent Porter Faculty Gallery. Concurrently showing in the Sesnon Underground Gallery is for the breath of a poem, an installation by alumna **Diane Jacobs** (Porter '88). This work is an homage to the late teacher and poet, Kathleen Flowers. Check our website for exhibition events.

Gallery History: The Porter-Sesnon family has always been a generous supporter of UC Santa Cruz and its mission. In 1968, a gift from Barbara Sesnon Cartan established the Mary Porter Sesnon Art Gallery, in memory of her mother. Other gifts have provided scholarships and grants for Porter undergraduates. It was the extraordinary gift of nearly seventy acres of Porter-Sesnon land that created the endowment that the College now enjoys. The 5th College at UCSC (College Five) was founded in 1969 and was renamed Porter College in 1981.

The [Mary Porter Sesnon Art Gallery](#) encourages interdisciplinary discourse through the lens of the arts. The gallery hours are Tuesday-Saturday 12-5 p.m. and Wednesday 12-8 p.m. The gallery is located at Porter College in the Arts Division on the campus of UC Santa Cruz, and is wheelchair accessible. Admission is always free and group tours are available by appointment: 831.459.3606.

#### PARKING

Short-term parking is available in metered areas at Porter College. At receptions there will be parking attendants selling event passes. Full day, "A" parking permits can be purchased at the main entrance campus kiosk during the day and at the Porter [College](#) lot between 4:30-8:30 p.m.

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