

She had to choose between two loves, but one came back and now showing off at the de Young Museum

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Corey Weiner was shocked when her portrait of an elderly woman was selected for exhibit at The de Young Open, an online celebration of the museumâ??s 125th anniversary.

For one, odds were against her; 11,500 individual artworks were submitted by 6,190 artists from the nine Bay Area counties. The work of only 763 artists made the cut.



Corey Weiner

And while she once toyed with an art career, instead she chose the culinary world. Sheâ??d taken up art again once she was settled in that work. â??I only went back to my art nine years ago,â?• she said.

Weiner studied fine arts for two years at the University of Michigan. But in 1976 she chose to become a chef, preferring something creative that also guaranteed a pay check. She enrolled in a two-year program the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y.

What followed was 13 years of paying her dues in restaurants in San Francisco and in a desert community. Eventually, she landed a job at The Stratford, a luxury senior independent living facility in

San Mateo. That experience led her to the position of head chef of the newly established Rhoda Goldman Plaza senior living facility in San Francisco. Now, at 63, sheâ??s their Food and Beverage director, overseeing a staff of 65.



â??Estelle.â?•

It was her 30-by-40-inch oil of a Goldman Plaza resident, sitting in her wheelchair, that was selected by the de Young. â??Her name is Estelle and at the time of the portrait she was 100.â?• She has since passed away.

Weiner has been attracted to expressionistic portrait painting since her childhood in Detroit. â??Iâ??ve always been curious about people.â?• Weiner felt that if she just painted what she saw, a story was told.

After settling in at the Goldman Plaza, she was able to incorporate art back into her schedule. â??I was able to let go and relax, my mind more open, like a meditation,â?• she said.

A pile of resident portraits sitting on the desk of an executive assistant provided more inspiration. â??I started snatching her photos and painting them myself.â?•

That then sprung the idea to have students at The Jean Henry School of Art, where she had resumed her training, use residents as models. During the exhibit of their work at the plaza, artists met residents while sipping wine and sampling hor dâ??ouevres. The show was up for six weeks and wildly popular. And an annual event was born.

Encouraged by management, Weiner showcased her own art in the Spring. Forty-six of her paintings were mounted along the facilityâ??s hallways: portraits, abstracts, and some fantasy subjects.

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Portrait by Corey Weiner.

â??Once I start painting, even if I have a vision, I canâ??t seem to control how I paint. For me, it is less about the technicality, and more about the energy and emotion of the image,â?• she said.

Layering different, dynamic colors, she reflects on a range of emotions from haunted, reflective, somber to fun-loving, quirky, wise and sensual. Her detail makes patterned shirts, hair and jewelry pop.



Portrait by Corey Weiner

â??Put a brush in my hand, and Iâ??m happy,â?• said Weiner. But, so does a whisk. At university while studying art, she took turns cooking in her 60-person communal living pod. â??I saw the beauty in tomatoes, and like art, I felt the creativity in cooking. Except for the clean-up, the whole thing just disappears until a new creation emerges,â?• she said.

Her mother and brother were great cooks, she said, but â??I was forever banned from the kitchen when some pudding landed on the ceiling and walls.â?•



Painting by Corey Weiner.

Weiner landed in San Francisco where her brother lived. Her first job was line cook at the Holiday Inn, Union Square. â??Being an adrenaline junkie, I loved the pace of being a line cook. It takes over your whole system as you juggle doing many things at the same time,â?• she said.

After a couple of years, Weiner changed jobs, working as a line cook at the Donatello Hotelâ??s high-end restaurant on Post Street. She also became a saucier, preparing the soups and sauces.

Over the next 13 years or so, she worked at Allegro, a southern Italian restaurant on Russian Hill, The Warehouse, a hip eatery South of Market, The Oasis, a South of Market bar offering lunch during the day, and CafÃ© Allegro near the Civic Center.

Weiner switched restaurants hoping to find someone to take her under their wing. She was looking for guidance, for mentors who would take her to the next level. â??I was either not succeeding or not happy,â?• she said. â??Either way I wasnâ??t finding my place in that end of the hospitality industry.â?•

Thinking an out-of-town stint might be a solution, Weiner accepted a position at a time-share in Warner Springs, Calif. â??They dropped me in the middle of the desert.â?•

After a year or so, sheâ??d had enough of the desert sun. In 1998, she was offered the job of executive chef at The Stratford retirement community in San Mateo. But she still wasnâ??t satisfied and jumped at the chance to get in on the opening of Rhoda Goldman Plaza in 2000. â??I felt the work was getting repetitive, and I was tired of commuting from the city.â?•

Rhoda Goldman Plaza hired Weiner with a clear message, she said. They encouraged her creativity â?? she recently rented a refrigerated cart and walked through the halls offering ice cream â?? and wanted â??Ritz Carltonâ?• kosher food for their residents.

She oversees a staff of 65 who prepare and serve three meals a day in the dining room, cater events and parties, supply kosher meals-on-wheels, and operate a cafÃ© as well as provide room service to 142 residents.

The kosher meals-on-wheels program is earmarked for seniors in the community through a program of the Jewish Children and Family Services. When the cafÃ© is open, itâ??s for residents, their guests, their families, and staff at Rhoda Goldman Plaza and Jewish Children and Family Services.

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Since the pandemic, residents have been offered room service. â??We are allowing 20 people at lunch and dinner in the dining room, with open windows and seating people six feet apart,â?• Weiner said. â??Everyone has a chance to come to one dinner and one lunch per week, although many opt out and prefer to stay in their rooms.â?•

From Weinerâ??s perspective, itâ??s all going seamlessly, thanks to a â??top-notch staff, some with me for 20 years.â?• From the residentâ??s point of view, it depends.

Weiner checks regularly with residents on their needs and desires. â??I get a lot of praise, but also a lot of complaints such as â??My mother made it better than you.â??â?• She said. â??I canâ??t compete with memory.â?•

But sometimes they try. If a resident has a favorite recipe, she said, â??Weâ??ll try it out, we want to please.â?•

It was a long road to find the right spot, the right mentors â?? in her career and her art. â??When I started in The Jean Henry School of Art, I took one class, which grew to an average of four a week,â?• she said. â??Mike Ritch, the owner-instructor, taught me a lot, encouraged me and gave honest critique. I couldnâ??t have progressed as far as I have without him or my two other great teachers, Danielle Lawrence and Scott Hewicker.â?•

And now, she is exploring new art directions besides portraiture. Weinerâ??s Goldman Plaza exhibit can be seen at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIW8xbKT0qE&t=15s. She can be reached at coreyw@rgp.org.

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