

TAOS NEWS

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MAJA RUZNIC AT THE HARWOOD

By Dena Miller



Courtesy photo: Ruznic's work hangs at the Harwood

'While I was pregnant, my husband (artist Joshua Hagler) and I watched our cat, Judith, chase the light from window to window, following that warm spot around to lay down in it,' Maja Ruznic recalled. "I said to Josh, 'Oh, look, she's in the sliver of the sun.' And then I realized that was exactly what I needed, also."

"In the Sliver of the Sun" - Ruznic's latest series of work in all of its gossamer glory - will premier in the Peter and Madeleine Martin Gallery with a virtual opening Friday (March 12) at 5:30 p.m. The Zoom link and passcode are available on the museum's Exhibits page at harwoodmuseum.org.

Ruznic's work has been featured in both national and international galleries but "In the Sliver of the Sun" will be her first solo museum show, a coup not just for the artist but for the Harwood and for Taos.

The past decade has seen the star of this young artist rise rapidly in the skies of contemporary art. In addition to her exhibitions throughout the U.S. and Europe, a series of installation and performance art appearances received wide media attention across a broad range of demographics.

Prior works of Ruznic, who was born in Bosnia Herzegovina and fled with her mother before the outbreak of war, frequently depicted "the experiences of her early life with shared trauma, fleeing and loss reflected in the phenomenon of immigration," noted Nicole Dial-Kay, curator of exhibitions and collections for the Harwood.

With this exhibition, however, Ruznic is looking at her world through the eyes of her own motherhood, whose daughter, Mila, is now 8 months old. “Ancestry and other themes from my childhood are interwoven, of course,” she said, “but for this study I shifted from the monochromatic to a misty and very gentle palette in color and form. Much like our cat seeking the sun, I was drawn to creating a cozy environment in my paintings and for my audience.”

With watered-down acrylics, oils, and a subtractive technique of sanding, her paintings “leave a sense of ghostly materiality; an undefined absence,” Dial-Kay noted. “Ghostly figures simultaneously fade into and emerge from the horizon, as if returning from a long journey ... the figures appear to be roaming through a realm not of this world.”

The series, Ruznic acknowledged, illustrates a deepening of the spiritual endeavor of her art, of communion and of receiving grace, allowing her paintings to visually reveal themselves slowly within the space of the canvas. Even her large-scale pieces, of which there are many, are surprisingly intimate in their reveal as you stand before them.

“The paintings are reflective of my pregnancy and post-pregnancy needs for physical and emotional comfort,” she mused, noting their delicacy “is as ethereal as pregnancy, and the adjustment it requires of your head, your heart and your body.”

After emigrating from Bosnia, Ruznic’s family resettled on the U.S. West Coast, where she completed her Bachelor of Fine Arts at University of California, Berkeley, and her Master of Fine Arts at California College of Art, San Francisco.

Now living in Roswell with her family, Ruznic said the move to this state “made all the difference in our art, and for our family.” Hagler was selected for the Roswell Artist in Residency program, and, “having our studios, and space for Mila, has been extraordinary.” They are considering a future move to Taos.

In addition to Ruznic’s virtual opening, the Harwood has planned two other online programs with the artist. On March 26, from 5:30-6:30 p.m., the Taos Chamber Music Group and the Academy of Performing Arts will join Ruznic in a members-only event featuring performances inspired by her paintings. And, on April 22 at 5:30 p.m., Ruznic will hold an open artist’s talk with questions and answers. Be sure to mark the dates on your calendar.

“It’s said there’s the painting you come to see at an exhibit, and then there’s the painting that makes you stay,” Maja Ruznic mused. The Harwood hopes you will find both waiting for you “In the Sliver of the Sun.”