

ROSWELL DAILY RECORD

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ART: IN THE SLIVER OF THE SUN — MAJA RUZNIC

By Christina Stock



Submitted Photo Maja Ruznic working on a painting in her studio located at the historic Roswell Artist-in-Residence Compound on Berrendo Road.

The Harwood Museum of Art of the University of New Mexico announced its spring exhibition featuring Roswell artist Maja Ruznic.

In a phone interview, Ruznic talked about living in Roswell. “We are here because my husband, Joshua Hagler, who is also a great painter — he received the grant at the end of 2017, and we both moved here for that. We lived in L.A., in California. After the year was up, we basically decided to stay and we were fortunate enough that one of the houses in the alumni compound was available, which is on Berrendo, where the former residence was.”

Asked why they decided to stay, Ruznic said, “We were really struggling in California as artists. Everything was so expensive and the hustle was getting unsustainable. And we were getting older. When you’re in your 20s, living on very little and staying up late and working multiple jobs, it’s kind of doable, but I am getting close to my 40s and my husband is 41, so we just wanted a better quality of life.”

This decision Ruznic said was also better for their career. “Everything was flourishing and it didn’t make sense going back to the big city anymore.

“I think that kind of stereotype of the artist who lives a ‘rock star’ life, who stays up late, does drugs, that’s an outdated idea of an artist’s. Artists today are more like any other career. You need to pay the bills, you need to make a living, you need to function like a regular member of society, so living in the city is a lot more competitive as well. It was

really something that saved us in many ways,” she said.

Asked how she met her husband, Ruznic said, “We met in San Francisco in 2012 or 2013 through the art scene. We were both painters. Even though San Francisco is a lot bigger than Roswell, every community has its own international community if you will. Everybody knows everyone in the art world, so when I was in graduate school, I found out about Joshua’s work because he is a great painter and vice versa, he found out about mine and we just happened to exhibit there at the same gallery at one point. We met there and we were fond of each other’s work before we were romantically involved. It was nice to start out with deep respect and admiration for each other.

“To this day, we can’t finish a painting without getting the other one’s approval. It is really a beautiful relationship we have that is so — we are lucky that our careers are also our passions. We just had a baby eight months ago. It is really beautiful that we can balance this new parent and work on our upcoming exhibitions and we make our own schedules, but it also is fun and joyous,” Ruznic said.

Asked about the title for her exhibit in Taos, Ruznic said, “I started making the work right when the pandemic started, and I was five months pregnant and I started feeling this immense sense of doom — the pandemic was just starting, the lockdown, my belly was growing and it was the sense, ‘My God, what am I bringing this baby into.’ One day, when I was sad, I was sitting on our couch, drinking tea. I noticed that our cat kept moving around the house wherever the sun was. I talked to myself, ‘That’s exactly what we are going to do during the pandemic. We are going to follow the sliver of the sun, in the darkness we’re going to have a moment for warmth in our body.’ The title really came from our beloved cat, showing me to seek that sliver, no matter how difficult it is. All the paintings are looking at my upcoming motherhood at that time, so a lot of the paintings are titled, ‘The Painter and Her Child, ‘The painters and their daughter,’ it was looking forward in time to when we would have our daughter through a more hopeful lens than the reality we were living in. It was like the cat told me to keep seeking it.”

Ruznic’s work has a feeling of being ethereal and spirited. “Yes, spirituality, and the sense of transcendence through art is very important to me, so I am very glad that comes across,” she said.

Asked about her future projects, Ruznic said, “I have been working on an entirely different body of work that is actually quite different. It’s a body of work that I am making for my upcoming exhibition in New York, I have a gallery called Karma and that’s my next show. I am making a series of paintings, they are different in a sense that I am exploring color in a different way. The painting is much more layered and everything seems like it is happening at night, so there is a sense of nocturnal. I think a lot of it has to do with having a baby and being woken up a lot during the night. My sleep pattern is very, very disturbed and I find a sense of that the conscious and subconscious merged. I am trying to create a sense of otherworldliness through color. I am really playing with color relationships and provoke that half-in-sleep, half-awake state. They will be exhibited next year in New York.

“Trying to surrender to the fact that my brain is different becoming a mother, I was so used to being fully rested, kind of bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. When you are a new mother, something happens to your body and also breastfeeding, this connection to be feeding this tiny little being and not getting enough sleep. I think I am just much more interested on how my brain is perceiving information. It really feels weird, like if

things really happened or if they were in my dreams. There is a sense of blending — the boundary between sleeping and waking is very blurred. A lot of the people and the colors, some of the paintings are totally abstract. I am trying to evoke something you remember, but you're not sure if it is a photograph, a real event or a dream. It is working with the sleep deprivation instead of fighting it and to see what comes out of it," she said.

The pandemic hasn't impacted Ruznic's work, just transformed it from being live to being online.