

arts of Ojai

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Ojai artist's 'Journeys' arrive home

Florence's first solo exhibit set for Friday

By Amy Tomsick

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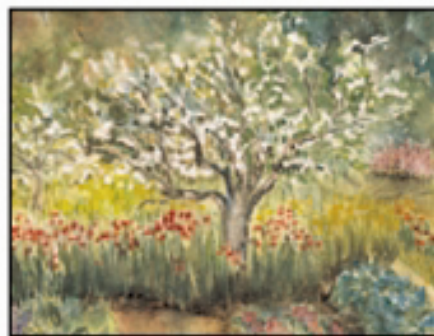
Local artist and writer Susan Florence will be having her first solo exhibition of watercolors at The Oaks in Ojai. Well-known for her playful artwork which has adorned greeting cards and gift products since 1971, Florence is now concentrating on creating original watercolors, which have appeared as vignettes in her books, called "The Journeys Series," published by Helen Exley Giftbooks in the U.S. and the U.K.

After more than 30 years of focusing on decorative artwork, Florence decided in 1998 that it was time for a change. She says, "I was ready for something new, wanting to pursue my painting and write more books." This led her to study plein air painting with some excellent local teachers such as Barbara Greene and Sally Miller. She likens painting to a form of meditation, describing the process as "fun, but always a challenge."

Not only has her artwork taken off in a new direction, so has her writing. Before she mainly wrote verse to appear in greeting cards and on stationery, whereas now her themes in "The Journeys Series" have become much deeper. For example, in one of her books entitled "Your Journey ... A Passage Through a Difficult Time," she deals with "the topics of finding one's self in a time of feeling lost, discovering



Above: Susan Florence's "Matilija Poppies." Below, "Peter's Garden."



meaning in going through a difficult time and finding peace again." While she initially wrote the books for herself, she has found that they speak to many people all around the world as they have been translated into Norwegian, French, Finnish, Portuguese and Polish.

After so many years of making a living through her art work, Florence has a philosophical attitude toward her creativity. She says, "People have asked me, 'Aren't you afraid you will run out of creative ideas?' I have learned that creativity is an outgoing flow of energy and the more you do, the more ideas will come."

The public is invited to attend the artist's reception at The Oaks at Ojai today from 5:15 to 7 p.m. Books from "The Journeys Series" are available locally at Tottenham Court in Ojai (646-2339) and The Studio Gallery in Oxnard (985-1546) or online at www.susanflorence.com.