

A close-up, artistic painting of a face. The face is rendered in shades of yellow, green, and brown, with dark, expressive brushstrokes for the eyes and eyebrows. A hand, also painted, holds a paintbrush with a black handle and a silver ferrule, applying paint to the eye area. The background is a vibrant mix of red, orange, and blue, suggesting another face or a dynamic environment. The overall style is expressive and textured.

small wonders

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No

Mary



When most of us squeeze a tube, we get toothpaste. Or hair gel. Or skin cream. Mary Zarbano gets splendor. She gets life. She dabs amber onto her palate, then adds red, white. Even before bristles touch canvas, her brush dances artfully, like a conductor's baton, bouncing, blending, a prelude to the symphony of creative expression. Blue, violet, black, indigo. "For me, colors create moods," Mary says. "It's a healing thing. It goes right through you. I'm especially attracted to muted colors. I love grays, different shades of gray. It's like on a foggy day, you see a geranium, and it's just so red against that gray, redder than it's ever been before. It's magic." Is there anything else that could evoke the same depth of emotion? "My daughters," Mary says.



A

wild

little gypsy

Mary Zarbano was 11 when her passion for art first took hold. “It became my life,” she says. “Like breathing.” She grew up in Omaha, Nebraska, the daughter of a Scotch-Irish father and a Sicilian-born mother, the latter of whom arrived at Ellis Island in 1922 and never learned a word of English. “A wild little gypsy,” Mary says with a smile, her eyes darting heavenward. Mary’s mom was 24 and nearly blind when she came to America with her first husband, who died shortly after they arrived. The tiny woman with the raven hair somehow regrouped, remarried and rebuilt her life on the Great Plains. At night, Mary would listen to the prairie wind howl as her mom spun dreamlike tales – part fact, part Sicilian fable. “My mom,” Mary says, “is where I got my artistic talent.”





&

Picasso
Chagall
mother
daughter



Mothers and daughters often find their way into Mary's paintings. Her works in a recent exhibition at the Sarah Bain Gallery in Brea included "Caro Madre" ("Dear Mother"), depicting a soulful figure with two dark curls holding a child, face half in shadow, half in light. In "Sisters," a tall, slender young woman sits snug beside a girl who holds a mask to her face, a bright red flower in her lap. Mary doesn't like to try to describe her subjects or style. "If I could explain it," she says, "I wouldn't do it." She does acknowledge the influence of Picasso, Chagall, her mom and the intense relationships she shares with her daughters, both of whom suffer from mental illness. "There's no end to the love between a mother and her children," she allows.



A

At age 72, Mary feels like she's in the prime of her artistic life. After marriage at 17, a move to California, the births of her children and the death of her first husband, she spent most of her adult life as caregiver to her daughters and mother. Still, she found time to earn a master's of fine arts from Cal State Long Beach, teach at Saddleback College and pursue her own creative vision. These days she paints in the warm light of a 1,600-foot studio in La Palma, assisted by her husband, Ned Schultz, who used to buy her paintings and is still her biggest fan. She exhibits in galleries in Taos and Aspen as well as Southern California. The childhood spark still glows. Like a geranium against a field of gray.



geranium

against a field
of gray.



SARAH BAIN GALLERY

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OF THE SIN

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Design
Copy Writer
Photographer

Asplandesign
Dennis Arp
Sasaki Photography

714.738.5587
714.257.9211
714.540.2433

kaspland@asplandesign.com
cecomm@mindspring.com
sasakiphoto@earthlink.net