

Day Tripping: Murray Burleigh and a classic diner

FEBRUARY 2016

HALF MOON BAY

WEDDING SECTION

COASTAL BRIDE

TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR THE BIG DAY

FLYING ORCHID

ARTIST FINDS BEAUTY OF LIFE IN ORCHID PROJECT

FIRST PERSON

GETTING HER GOATS

NO DOGS ALLOWED? THEN HOW ABOUT GOATS?

Q&A

SAN MATEO COUNTY PARK RANGER AND PHOTOGRAPHER ROB CALA





Against the tide

ARTIST MAKES
MEMORIES
WITH ORCHID
PROJECT

Finding beauty


Photos and story by Cat Cutillo

No one could have been more surprised than Sohyun Im to find herself working among 1,000 orchids. Before starting her job at E Plant World in Half Moon Bay last summer, she had never seen or even heard of orchids. What's more, she felt indifferent to nature and never liked flowers.

"I didn't really like the flowers because they die, and I thought they were useless," says Im. "I never understood why people liked flowers before."

Originally from South Korea, Im moved to the Bay Area six years ago to attend San Francisco Art Institute and pursue a bachelor's degree in painting. Shortly after graduation, she landed this unusual opportunity as E Plant World's product designer, creating orchid art using real, preserved flowers. She's



A person wearing a black long-sleeved shirt is holding several large, vibrant orchid petals in their hands. The petals are in shades of pink, orange, purple, and teal. The background is filled with numerous white orchids in bloom, creating a lush and beautiful setting. The lighting is soft, highlighting the textures of the petals.

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produced sculptures, paintings and, more recently, gold-plated orchid jewelry.

“I think it’s artwork of the nature. It’s already an artwork, and I re-create them into human-made art,” says Im.

According to Im, it takes more than one month to preserve the flowers through a labor-intensive chemical process that is nursery owner Heeseung Lee’s secret recipe. But Im says it’s worth the wait just to be able to release her message out into the world through this art.

“We want to represent freedom out of these butterfly-shaped orchids because everyone wants to be free. We really hope that someday we can be free,” says Im. “We try to free the flower from the pot into flying creatures.”

She’s named the project “Flying Orchid” and believes there is a butterfly in each of us waiting to be set free.

“I constantly, intuitively, make them flying creatures,” says Im. “Because secretly I want to fly and be free from this world,” she says. “When I was in school I used to paint a lot of unreal paintings to escape from the reality.”

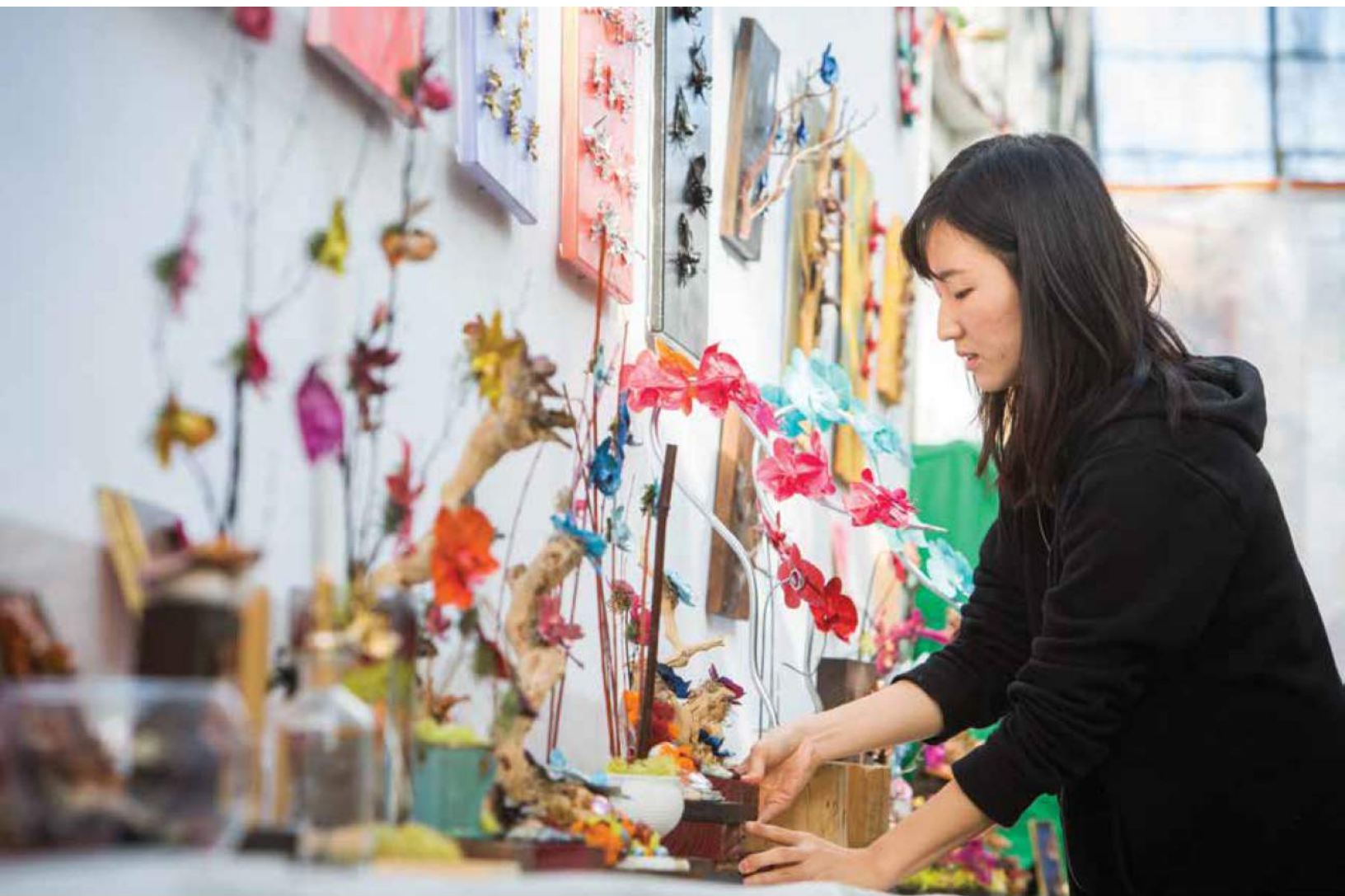
And escape she has. The nursery itself is an undeniable break from reality. The rows and rows of perfectly organized white orchids and the rhythmic trickling of water is hypnotic. Over in the corner of the nursery, bending under a warm tungsten light, is Sohyun Im with her glue gun in one hand and a fluorescent orchid flower in the other, gluing the petals to a piece of driftwood, her makeshift studio in plain site inside the nursery.

She pushes open some curtains beside her to reveal a wall of plastic bins filled with preserved orchid flowers, each box organized by color, like the rainbow racks of clothing at a thrift store.



Sohyun Im's artwork is just as spectacular as the orchids she uses to make it. They often seem to represent flight and freedom.





Sohyun Im uses a glue gun to create joyful, beautiful objects that greet customers at E Plant World in Half Moon Bay.

You start to realize there's much more going on here beneath the sheen of perfectly organized orchids. In fact, there is an entire row of her art that suddenly grabs you on your way out — it's the last thing you would expect to see here.

Her art is almost the alter ego of the perfectly lined living orchids. It has a kitschy, fluorescent joy bursting from it. The irony is that her art often looks more alive than the potted orchids.

Im says the response has been especially positive from kids who touch and sometimes break the pieces. But she doesn't seem to mind. She enjoys the joy she's passing on.

"Instead of what they say, I like their expressions. When they smile that makes me really happy," she says.

And despite the fact that her orchid art's future is unknown, she says its success is secondary to what it has already given her.

"Rather than the outcome, for me the time that I spent and the memories that I have working

here, making this, those are more important than the outcomes like success or sales," says Im. "Those are the things that matter."

Im says the experience has changed her.

"I used to have a lot of very negative thoughts. I didn't really see the beauty from this world. And now, working here, surrounded by thousands of orchids, thousands of beautiful flowers, I feel like now I see the beauty of this world."

She's changed her mind about something else, too.

"When I'm looking at the flower and thinking why this flower exists, I feel like this world is just so beautiful," says Im. "When I think about why this flower exists, it's just pure beauty. They just exist for beauty."

A fleeting joy that Im now sees as enough.

HALF MOON BAY

Visit www.flyingorchid.net to see her work