

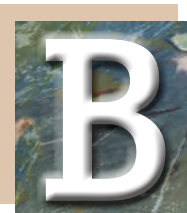


Hands, space and the time to explore art — Sue Mitchell works with stones and mixed media in printmaking. The project is part of a year-long commitment to grow as an artist.

A YEAR OF ARTISTIC DISCOVERY

Business owner Sue Mitchell shifts her focus to pursue her passions

Written by Amy Bentley
Photos by Eric Reed



BEFORE SHE TURNED 50 a decade ago, Sue Mitchell lost 30 pounds with the help of a personal trainer, overhauled her eating habits and changed her hairstyle.

"I wanted to feel good about turning 50," said the co-founder of Riverside Personnel Services.

September brought another milestone birthday for Mitchell, as she reached 60 and made another major lifestyle change. She is taking a year off from her business

(while remaining a co-owner with co-founder Zelma Beard) to pursue her love of art.

"I decided the only way I would be purposeful during this year was if I had a show at the end," said Mitchell, a longtime supporter of local art causes.

She will be creating art, reading literature, visiting galleries and studios, and studying nature, science and art history. And then there's the matter of that capstone art show.

Riverside Art Museum has accepted her proposal for an original exhibition, "52," which will debut in October of 2013. Mitchell picked the name because she was born in 1952, her later-in-life art study is 52 weeks, and there are 52 trees she loves at Riverside's Fairmount Park, where she walks daily.

In one of the two galleries that will host her show — "Studio 52," Mitchell jokingly calls it — she will display art that she will create during the year, plus offer a performance art piece in a studio space.

The second gallery will showcase her study of the 52 trees she enjoys at Fairmount. This gallery, which she calls "Sanctuary 52," will include a printmaking project.

"This is my big vision," Mitchell said. "My friends are excited, but I don't know what the art world is going to say."

RAM Executive Director Drew Oberjuerge says she's excited that the

Transitions

What Sue Mitchell has learned about making a business-to-art leap:

- Make the change while you're still active. "I still have that energy level and that drive," she said.
- Narrow the focus, and pinpoint what you want to do. "I'm only going to study what I want to study. It's good to challenge yourself, but why make yourself miserable?"
- Explore your hidden talents and interests.
- Expect to face challenges in your skill set with any major career switch.

museum will host the exhibit and have Mitchell share her later-in-life journey.

"I see a lot of folks, including my parents, who are starting to retire and are thinking, 'What am I passionate about?' It's so inspiring that she's taking a break to think about her life and her community," Oberjuerge said.

Museums are always searching

for ways to engage the community, especially retiring Baby Boomers who want meaningful ways to participate, Oberjuerge adds. She hopes Mitchell's exhibit will inspire others to take an art class and learn about art.

"There are so many dimensions and layers to this exhibition that are so exciting," said RAM curator Kathryn Poindexter, who noted it's a relevant time to showcase older artists re-thinking their careers. Video journals and classes for those looking to change careers or take up a new hobby may be incorporated into the exhibit, and Mitchell is a great community spokesperson for that, Poindexter says.

Mitchell recently was a spotlight artist for the Riverside Community Art Association, and she put together a show that included printmaking works incorporating beautiful rocks in various colors and shapes that she has collected for many years.

Mitchell alternates between being



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eager and a little anxious about all of this. In the business world, she's been a team player who mostly delegates projects to others, but now it's all on her.

"An artist is about doing everything yourself," she said.

So what prompted the big move?

"Art was always lurking," said Mitchell, who has taken classes in painting, drawing and other art forms, but never really got serious about art. She has an eclectic contemporary art collection at home that includes lots of mixed-media pieces.

Mitchell started taking printmaking classes at Riverside City College in January 2009. At that time, the Inland Empire was in the midst of the recession.

"The economy was so bad. We were busy with people looking for work, but there were no jobs," she said, adding that art class was like therapy.

Mitchell expects to return to Riverside Personnel Services, at least part-time,



Mitchell, in her home art studio, is working on an exhibition for the Riverside Art Museum.

because she loves the business. But she also anticipates moving forward with her new-found art career too, at least recreationally. She has an adult son in

Arizona and no grandkids to hover over, so it's a good opportunity to pursue her passion. "I actually have time to be an artist," she said.

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