

The Picasso in us all

Husband-wife team Joey Forsythe and Alex Kritselis join with 50 local artists for new 'self-portrait' exhibition

By [Carl Kozlowski](#) 06/23/2011



Sometimes the best love stories seem to come out of a string of coincidences. For Pasadena art-world figures Joey Forsythe and Alex Kritselis, their decade-long partnership both as a couple and as collaborators began when a 10-hour plane flight from Greece that they were each traveling on separately was postponed a day due to engine trouble.

Alex had already helped Joey with her luggage on the initial flight before she fell asleep quickly, preventing a conversation. And when they met again the next day onboard, she fell asleep again, but woke up with enough time to have a four-hour conversation that's continued to this day, resulting in this weekend's opening of "Picasso's Dilemma," an ambitious public-art exhibit that is also designed to inspire young local artists to express themselves.

"The title came from two things," says Forsythe. "There are famous films of Picasso painting on glass, which was an inspiration for this idea. But more than that was his saying 'every child is an artist.' The issue for both Alex and me are the cuts that are happening in arts education and funding throughout the country. Every child is an artist, but how do they know if they don't get to try?"

Indeed, Forsythe recalls feeling like an outsider while growing up, a fact that led to her often feeling frustrated. Her passion for art is so strong that she says, "Art

saved my life, no question.”

“Picasso’s Dilemma” is a video installation that will be displayed at multiple sites across Pasadena between Saturday and July 4. More than 50 local artists ages 4 to adult painted quick “self-portraits” that could be either literal or surreal, onto a sheet of transparent glass.

As the paintings were created, Forsyte and Kritselis — who is also Pasadena City College’s dean of visual arts — ran video cameras recording each artist “through the looking glass,” revealing their creative process in an intriguing way that makes their art look like it’s growing right before the viewers’ eyes and becoming one with the artist. The final videos are rear-projected onto storefront windows across Pasadena, making it seem as if the subjects are actually painting directly on the storefront windows.

“We’ve been collaborating in video for the last two years, and she brings in skills as a cinematographer like nobody else I know,” says Kritselis. “And as an educator, I’ve found there’s always something incredible younger people come with. Education has a way of silencing artistic qualities, so we were looking for a way to bring younger children into the fold and establish relationships with more mature artists that could make them more expressive and put risks out into the world.”

While the Armory will serve as the main hub for the exhibition, among the other spaces to be used are a Laundromat in Northwest Pasadena, as well as locations at Lake Ave. and Washington Blvd. and in the South Lake Avenue district. All told, “Picasso’s Dilemma” should provide an entirely new way for residents to view Pasadena.

“Alex and I really love the idea of public art, temporary public art, engaging with the community outside of the traditional artistic institutions,” says Forsyte. “There’s something democratic about public art and how it’s available to anybody, and I think particularly with this project, we’re reaching out to everybody in the community, not just the art crowd. We’re framing Pasadena and no two locations will be exactly alike.”

“Picasso’s Dilemma” opens Saturday through Wednesday at the Armory Center for the Arts, 145 N. Raymond Ave., Pasadena, with a public reception from 7 to 9 p.m. The portraits move to 35 N. Fair Oaks Ave. from July 1 through July 3. For more information, visit the Facebook page for “Picasso’s Dilemma.”