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County Bank shows it's state of the art

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WATSONVILLE — Walk into Santa Cruz County Bank and you're not going to see just green.

You'll see blue and white and red and orange and virtually all the colors of the rainbow hanging from the walls.

A handful of renderings from five Watsonville artists are on display, creating somewhat of a surreal scene in an establishment more often equated with business as usual.

The paintings, nearly 20 of them, went up shortly after the bank opened in February at 595 Auto Center Drive, the third in the group to open in the county in the last year.

Mary Anne Carson, the bank's senior vice president, sees it as a chance for local artists to present their works while offering employees a pleasant surrounding.

It also fits into the greater vision of Santa Cruz County Bank, a relatively new institution that is locally owned and proud of that fact.

"We're here to help the community," said Carson, "and while that mostly consists of opening bank accounts and tending to banking needs, we'd like to branch out and give artists a one-up — a venue where they can display their works."

Howard Ikemoto, one of the artists, talks about his art with great enthusiasm as the acrylic piece hangs in the background and bank customers are busy making deposits.

"It started out as an abstract image," said Ikemoto, a retired art professor at Cabrillo College. "Then it turned into a

boat, but I never know what the image is going to be until it happens. It's always an evolution."

Mary Warshaw, another artist whose works are on display, said she thinks the light and the surroundings serve her



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Howard Ikemoto is among the five Pajaro Valley artists whose work is displayed at Santa Cruz County Bank on Auto Center Drive in Watsonville.

paintings justice.

"It's always nice to walk into a bank and see something nice, something pretty, something different," she said. "It's a breath of fresh air from all the posters with mortgage rates."

Warshaw has a pair of paintings that she's particularly proud of: Elkhorn Slough and Struve Slough. They hang inside Doug Fischer's office. He's the bank's business development officer.

"It's a pleasure to come to work every day and see such beautiful artwork on the wall," Fischer said. "And it's great for the local artists who have difficulty finding venues around here."

Which sometimes can be the case.

Although the Pajaro Valley Arts Council and Gallery in Watsonville has exhibits, unfortunately it's often the only show in town.

"They're so cool," said Carol Trengove, executive director of the Arts Council, referring to the bank's acceptance of local art. "We're always looking for other businesses, and there aren't that many who do it, and it's a great draw."

Last week, a proclamation was passed by the county Board of Supervisors welcoming the bank to town. In it, the bank was referred to as having "state-of-the-art" financial products. Little did proclamation writers realize that that phrase carried a double meaning.

And as the saying goes, "There's more to the picture than meets the eye."

Said Ron Milhoan, another Watsonville artist whose works are on display: "I think it's a good deal when your art hangs in a place where people can see it. Everybody benefits."

The art is for sale, too, if anybody is interested.

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