

LOCAL NEWS • News

# San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art's artistic message: Get out and vote

Facade mural, bus shelters and banners are part of the ICA's campaign



SAN JOSE, CA – OCTOBER 27: The Facade Project by Amir H. Fallah adorns the entrance to the Institute of Contemporary Art in San Jose, Calif., on Tuesday, Oct. 27, 2020. The gallery commissioned the mural to coincide with a voting center being hosted at the site October 31 through November 3. (Anda Chu/Bay Area News Group)

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When **Ali Gass** joined San Jose's Institute of Contemporary Art as its new executive director this summer, she enlisted Iranian American artist **Amir H. Fallah** to transform the facade of the downtown gallery. If the ICA couldn't bring visitors inside because of COVID-19, Gass figured, the art would be presented where it could be seen from the outside.

But "The Facade Project," the Los Angeles-based artist's detailed and colorful rumination on the meaning of identity, took on a new significance in August when Gass learned that the nearby MACLA gallery wouldn't serve as a vote center this year as it had for previous elections. The ICA stepped in at the 11th hour to be the location in the arty South First Area (SoFA) where voters could drop-off a mail-in ballot or cast a ballot in person this weekend.

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Fallah's artwork became the basis for street banners and VTA bus shelter ads to get out the vote. The ICA produced buttons and stickers with images from the two circular tondos rotating in the gallery's front windows surrounding a single word, "VOTE." The artwork is certainly politically engaged, with text like "A Borderless World" on the mural, but Gass points out it doesn't cross the line.

"It doesn't say vote one way or another. It doesn't reflect any literal partisan rhetoric," Gass said. "You can interpret it all different ways, which to me is the best political art. It doesn't smack you over the head but allows you to engage visually and then engage conceptually."





SAN JOSE, CA – OCTOBER 27: A "VOTE!" button to go along with The Facade Project by Amir H. Fallah is photographed at the Institute of Contemporary Art in San Jose, Calif., on Tuesday, Oct. 27, 2020. The gallery commissioned the mural project to coincide with a voting center being hosted at the site October 31 through November 3. (Anda Chu/Bay Area News Group)

The ICA will be open as a vote center Oct. 31-Nov. 2 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on Nov. 3 from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m., with COVID-19 protocols in place. In partnership with the nearby San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles, staff members will distribute art kits for kids whose parents are waiting to vote.

And if you've already sent in your ballot, don't sweat it; Fallah's mural will be on display for about a year.

"The first phase of its life is deeply tied to the election, but it will be up and we'll be programming around it for the rest of the year," Gass said. "It's certainly a project that is resonant well beyond the scope of the election."

**HALLOWEEN AT HOME:** Elementary school-age kids bummed about not trick-or-treating this year can still have some fun online Saturday thanks to an online "Zoom-Loween" party, hosted by Safe From the Start and the Healthier Kids Foundation of Santa Clara County.



Activities include spooky stories; Halloween-themed games, jokes and skits; a dance party; and contests for best costume and pumpkin carving (with Target gift cards for the winners). There is a one-hour session at 6 p.m. for pre-schoolers through third-graders and another at 7 p.m. for kids in fourth through sixth grade.

For more information and to receive the Zoom link, contact **Marissa Hacker** at the Healthier Kids Foundation at [Marissah@hkidsf.org](mailto:Marissah@hkidsf.org).

**EXPLORING DIVERSITY THROUGH FOOD:** Cristo Rey San Jose Jesuit High School is bringing back its Cooking with Character campaign as a virtual event this year, with a series of “lunch and learn” sessions that explore the diversity and importance of food within our community.

The first one on Oct. 29 focuses on the Future of Food and Farming, with **Elaine Scott**, dean of the School of Engineering at Santa Clara University, moderating a discussion with **Samuel Bertram**, the co-founder of vertical farming start-up OnePointOne, and Loaves & Fishes CEO **Gisela Bushey**. Other sessions will include pairing food with beer, wine and spirits, and how food shapes our culture and community.

A donation of \$50 is suggested to attend all the virtual events. For more information or to register, go to [www.cristoreysj.org](http://www.cristoreysj.org).

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## Sal Pizarro | San Jose metro columnist

Sal Pizarro has written the Around Town column for The Mercury News since 2005. His column covers the people and events surrounding the cultural scene in Silicon Valley. In addition, he writes Cocktail Chronicles, a feature column on Silicon Valley bars and nightclubs.

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