

# Nordic 5 Arts

An organization of professional artists  
in the San Francisco Bay Area of Nordic/Scandinavian descent  
Nordic5Arts.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Art Exhibition

## Going North

August 14 – October 30, 2009

Eddie Rhodes Gallery, Contra Costa College  
2600 Mission Bell Dr., San Pablo, CA 94806

**Opening Reception** Thursday, August 27, 5 – 8 PM

### Lectures:

6:00 PM – Elizabeth Stokkebye: *Karen Blixen – Author and Artist*

6:30 PM – Colette Crutcher: *Four Scandinavian Authors*

A juried exhibition by Nordic 5 Arts, an organization of professional artists in the San Francisco Bay Area of Nordic/Scandinavian descent:

Patricia Bengtson-Jones, Kati Casida, Chuck Clanton, Colette Crutcher, Olivia Eielson, Jason Englund, Mark Erickson, Ellen Faris, Pam Fingado, Norma Andersen Fox, Marc Ellen Hamel, Russell Herrman, Maj-Britt Hilstrom, Debra Jewell, Maj-Britt Moberg, Dorothy Nissen, Susan Peterson, Loren Rehbock, Diane Rusnak, Helene Sobol, Elizabeth Stokkebye, B. Stevens Strauss and Helena Tiainen

**Exhibition catalog** available at [Nordic5Arts.com](http://Nordic5Arts.com)

**For additional information**, please contact

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In *Going North*, the artists address their Scandinavian heritage in traditional and innovative ways. The presence of water images is to be expected from people whose world was surrounded by the sea. And there is also the tradition of fine craft and minimal design, evident in many of the works in this exhibition. Light is a prominent theme. Is it the darkness of the north that makes these artists create such luminous works?

Out of tradition come innovations in material – prints on leather, paintings on steel and orderly compositions from fragments of sculptural process. For some of these artists, *Going North* becomes a journey in time and/or space. Others delve into the unconscious, their inner worlds, and dreaming. The works offered here are those that struck me as the most interesting and compatible with the gallery space.

Claudia Chapline, Juror

Within the many different cultures that coexist in the United States in general and the Bay Area in particular, art is a universal language that cuts across cultural boundaries. It not only reflects the culture on which it is based, but within this context, artists have the opportunity to express their own personal vision. In addition to the diversity of cultures we experience on a daily basis, our work is in one way or another informed by the Nordic culture of our heritage which consciously and unconsciously nourishes our imaginations.

The exhibition is comprised of artists working in a variety of media – painting, sculpture, graphics, photography, weaving and ceramics. Several are art teachers in schools or teach workshops in their studios. As professional artists, we are strong supporters of art programs and take great pleasure in presenting this exhibition at Contra Costa College where we have a unique opportunity to share our art and cultural heritage with students and faculty in a stimulating academic environment.

We hope that our varied collection with regard to medium, content and style, coupled with our own individual Nordic-inspired expression, will open up new avenues of exploration and learning. We also hope that the exhibition will generate discussion and analysis while also provide moments of inspiration and pure enjoyment.

Pat Bengtson-Jones, Curator  
Maj-Britt Hilstrom, Co-Curator

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## Historical Perspective

**Scandinavia:** Denmark, Norway and Sweden

**Nordic Countries:** Scandinavia plus Finland and Iceland

*Today's usage of "Scandinavia" often refers to all five Nordic countries,  
thus making the two terms Scandinavia and Nordic virtually interchangeable.*

Dating back to the Stone Age, the Nordic countries known today as Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden had small populations which remained isolated from the rest of the world. In the Middle Ages, a new and vigorous seafaring people emerged from Scandinavia whose courageous and adventurous spirit led them southward in their quest to trade with and to conquer other lands. Known as the Vikings, they sailed south with armadas of masterfully built ships and established settlements in England, Ireland and France. Their expeditions fanned out in other directions as well and the Norse Sagas give an account of the voyage by Leif Ericson who landed in North America c. 1000 A.D. He named it Vinland and established a small settlement which was later discovered in Newfoundland, Canada. Ericson has been acknowledged as the first European to land in North America and, in 1964, the United States Congress authorized and requested the President to proclaim October 9 of each year as "Leif Ericson Day." That date was chosen to also commemorate the first organized immigration from Norway to the United States when the ship "Restauration" arrived in New York Harbor on October 9, 1825.

Due mostly to deteriorating economic conditions and growing poverty, there was large-scale emigration from the Nordic countries to the United States in the 1800's and into the 1900's. People with a craving for adventure and opportunity embarked onto ships which sailed to the new world where news of the Gold Rush and many other possibilities beckoned in a nation with seemingly endless resources. Many of them settled in Brooklyn while others went to the Mid-West where they were given homesteads. Some found their way to California to take part in the Gold Rush while others moved to the Pacific Northwest where the scenery and climate reminded them of the countries of their birth. Although most of the members of Nordic 5 Arts are 2nd and 3rd generation descendants of immigrants, several arrived during the past decades and have made the Bay Area their home.

As contemporary artists with diverse backgrounds, we share a rich common heritage which dates back to the Viking Age and the ancient Norse myths described in the Sagas, an era that ushered in a flourishing in the arts and architecture from the 8th to the 11th centuries A.D. Many centuries later, starting in the late 1800's and continuing well into the 1900's, the Nordic countries experienced another flourishing of artistic activity, giving birth to the Danish storyteller Hans Christian Andersen and the writer Isak Dinesen (AKA Karen Blixen), the Norwegian

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playwright Henrik Ibsen and the Swedish author August Strindberg – all of whom became national icons and received international acclaim. In music, Edvard Grieg in Norway and Jean Sibelius in Finland composed music which became embedded in the Nordic soul. In the visual arts, Carl Milles created an enchanting sculpture park in Stockholm and Henrik Vigeland was given an entire city park in Oslo where his monumental collection of sculptures depicts human life from birth to death. Edvard Munch, the Norwegian expressionist painter whose “Scream” still resonates a century later, received recognition on the international stage. In film, the well-known Swedish director Ingmar Bergman depicted human relationships and delved into the deep inner souls of the characters.

While introspection was often expressed in the arts, a new and fresh approach to design also emerged in which clean lines combined with practical functionality embodied a new Scandinavian style. The Finnish architect Alvar Aalto and the Danish craftsman Georg Jensen became internationally renowned for their elegant and innovative designs. Today, the most visible expression of Scandinavian design is offered to a mass market by the Swedish company IKEA which has established megastores all over the world and made good design affordable.

Our group of artists has assimilated many of these cultural influences which are fused together with our personal experiences as contemporary artists living and working in the San Francisco Bay Area. In the context of our fundamental shared heritage, I shall let our work speak for itself.

Helene Sobol  
Coordinator, Nordic 5 Art