

# Follow Your Fortune

By Kerry Methner / CASA

**I**N THE SPACE OF A FEW SECONDS, author, artist, and wise woman Lenore Tolegian Hughes, grasped the attention of the intimate gathering at the Monlleo Gallery last Sunday as she read from her novel *Cupsid Down: The Life And Times Of Miss Fortune*, due out later this year. Participants were treated to Tolegian Hughes' sparkling characters on and off the walls as those inhabiting the pages of her novel also held court around the room in watercolor on paper.

A celebration of life, the reception continued the launch of Tolegian Hughes' recent works, all painted and constructed by the kitchen, family, and relationship centered creative soul.

A Los Angeles native and Santa Barbara county resident, Tolegian Hughes has spent a lifetime creating and learning. "I was about five years old, and I remember watching my grandmother one evening as she brushed out her long flowing hair which she usually kept in a tidy bun during the day. She let me make a long braid with her hair all the way down her back. I was so proud to see what I had created," the artist explained. "That experience of braiding led me to discover that doing things with my hands came easily to me, and was comforting and satisfying."

The exhibit which runs through August



Lenore Tolegian Hughes

31st, exudes the artist's enthusiasm for life and her Armenian sensibilities. It's a psalm to the indomitable spirit of many first and second generation American-Armenians.

"The role of creative imagining for a visual artist and a writer in our culture is to help us define and distinguish us from one another and recognize what gives life meaning," she shared. "The artist's perspective is to take a deeper look at life and try to make sense out of the big questions we all face. Artists and writers define and refine our ideas and our visions until they are synthesized into a new idea, a new way to see the ordinary."

In addition to offering Tolegian Hughes' quirky sensibilities, the exhibit also makes room for mystery—both magical and deep. Symbolized by the demitasse cup rather than Forrest Gump's box of chocolates, the cups invite viewers to peer in and see what's in store.

"The mystery and anticipation draws me in," Tolegian Hughes shared of the similarities between painting and reading coffee grounds, a tradition in which she is well-versed. "I never know where my painting is going to take me, and it's always an adventure to see how it unfolds. Each creative experience is unique. It's the same with the coffee cups. Out of thousands and thousands of cups no two fortunes will ever be alike." And this exhibit, which is literally created in part with coffee, demonstrates this.

"As you look at the paintings of the faces in my exhibition, *Follow Your Fortune*, each face is

## at Monlleo Gallery

etched with their own fortune in invisible ink on their foreheads," she revealed. "You might think they are Armenians, that they are not you. But look again. The cultural setting is indeed Armenian but the human conditions the faces represent are universal statements about loss, beauty, hunger, sadness, desire, pain, longing, humor, love—feelings all humans share in common... And all the faces are about transformation through faith and determination. They are victorious and proud."

According to the artist, from ancient history to the present time Armenians and coffee go together with today being no different than in ancient times when it comes to the daily ritual of making a bracingly strong demitasse of coffee. That ritual involves a long handled coffee pot and a pulverized blend of Middle Eastern coffee. The pot is held over an open flame. The experience of drinking the dark brew continues until it is swallowed down to the thick residue of coffee at the bottom of the cup. That's when the cup is turned cupsid down on the saucer and allowed to cool. Patterns form as the grounds settle inside the cup. When the cup is turned right side up another dimension of the Armenian culture is uncovered—fortune telling.

For *Follow Your Fortune* Tolegian Hughes has painted cups of coffee with fortunes for us to follow and claim as our own, their secrets revealed by their titles.

Tolegian Hughes brews and then paints coffee directly onto each painting, which form unique fortunes in each cup just like their



good things will come when you least expect them, watercolor/ coffee, 37x27.5" by Lenore Tolegian Hughes

counterparts in real life. And as in real life, at the gallery the cups are offered from a coffee table. "It's like a welcome mat," she explained. "It represents generous hospitality."

Also in the gallery, a small room showcases an installation of contemporary religious iconography drawn from the Zeitgeist of the Armenians.

The artist's desire? That viewers let the "faces of fortune" in this exhibit "inspire us to choose our own destiny."

The Gallery is located at 327 A. So. Salinas St and is open We-Su 12-3pm. For info call 403-9162 or email: [amonlleo@yahoo.com](mailto:amonlleo@yahoo.com). For info about the artist visit [www.followyourfortune.com](http://www.followyourfortune.com)