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# UCSC remembers artist, founding faculty member

New exhibit, studio tour gives personal insight

By Kara Guzman

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**SANTA CRUZ »** After artist Mary Holmes developed arthritis, she used a cane with a nail on the end

to etch her 20-foot concrete labyrinth at her Happy Valley home and studio.

For a painting on a barn wall, she used a long stick to scratch the surface of paint she acquired from a municipal road mainte-

nance department, with shades she called "handicap blue" and "no parking red," said granddaughter Rachel O'Malley.

"There was a time she was painting on anything that didn't move fast enough," O'Malley said.

Holmes, art history professor and one of UC Santa Cruz's

founding faculty, lived at the 60-acre hilltop farm from 1969 until her death in 2002 at age 91. There Holmes not only worked on hundreds of paintings, but also built five chapels to house them. Decorated with repurposed materials such as wine

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## UCSC

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bottles and hundreds of paper mache angels, the chapels tell about creation, femininity and wisdom, O'Malley said.

Starting April 17, UCSC will host a seven-week festival, including a tour of Holmes's studio, to celebrate Holmes's art and teaching career.

O'Malley, who lived with Holmes as a UCSC graduate student, said the farm, with its menagerie of artwork and animals, creates a feeling of meditative calm.

"You go beyond day-to-day problems," O'Malley said. "You can really let go and imagine what it means to be human."

The festival includes an exhibit at Cowell College of around 20 paintings, including never-before-seen family portraits, only the second show of Holmes's work.

Joan Blackmer, curator of Cowell's Eloise Pickard Smith Gallery, said she senses tenderness and compassion in Holmes's paintings, many of which depict

## MARY HOLMES FESTIVAL

**What:** Exhibit, faculty panel, concert and studio tour celebrating artist and founding faculty member Mary Holmes

**When:** April 17 to June 5

**Where:** UCSC campus and Holmes's Santa Cruz studio

**Details:** Visit [www.mary-holmes.org](http://www.mary-holmes.org) or call 831-459-2953

mythological women and animals.

"She was just doing it for her family," Blackmer said. "It wasn't something she was trying to show to the outside world. It was really personal."

John Dizikes, UCSC emeritus professor, will speak at a faculty panel April 26 to remember Holmes and UCSC's early days. UCSC's legacy as nonconformist and off-beat is thanks to Holmes, said Dizikes. Holmes was private, but had an ardent student following, he said.

"Utterly charming," Dizikes said. "I mean honestly, children, animals, adults, colleagues — everybody fell for her."

Artist Coeleen Kiebert,

Holmes's student and a festival organizer, described Holmes as contrary and unpredictable.

"She was a feminist who hated feminists and a hippie who hated hippies," Kiebert said. "She was just way ahead of it all."

Larry Makjavich, an independent contractor, was a caretaker at Holmes's farm for 16 years. At Holmes's direction, he built the five chapels and studio. He said Holmes spent much of her time reading at the kitchen table, and her art was made at a slow pace, over a lifetime.

Makjavich said he remembers Holmes occasionally riding down Happy Valley Road on her elderly white horse Nelly, followed by ponies, goats and a few sheep.

"The cow would go too," Makjavich said. "Cars would have to slow down and here's Mary just smiling."

"Sometimes the ponies were a little ornery, but it was never a problem. They'd all follow her back home," he said. "The jersey cow would have a bell on its neck and you'd hear it twanging away."