

the Flame

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first impressions

CGU's Art Department and First Street Gallery Art Center
celebrate a 25-year partnership

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Alumna Jane Brucker was a former instructor at First Street Gallery Art Center. (Photo courtesy of Jane Brucker)

Jane Brucker (MFA, 1985) always wanted to teach. It ran in her family. Brucker’s father was a school superintendent in San Diego. Her uncle taught philosophy at Oxford.

As a master’s student in CGU’s Art Department, Brucker worked as a teaching assistant every semester. After she graduated, she spent several years teaching drawing at nearby community colleges and at Scripps and Pomona colleges.

But teaching full-time at First Street Gallery Art Center was a wholly unique experience—and one Brucker would continue to revisit as an alumna.

First Street Gallery is a Claremont-based nonprofit organization that provides professional art training and exhibition facilities for adults with developmental disabilities.

“The clients I worked with were creative and special,” Brucker said. “They were so bright and so free in ways even trained artists struggle with. I never had a job so delightful and where I laughed so much.”

Brucker is one of more than 60 MFA graduates from CGU who have come through First Street Gallery’s doors as employees, volunteers, and instructors over its 25-year history. This fall, CGU and the gallery launched a joint exhibition showcasing artwork from alumni and gallery artists to commemorate the relationship.

Currently, two of the gallery’s employees are CGU alumni: Rebecca Hamm (MFA, 1987), who taught for two years and has served as its director for the past 23 years, and Seth Pringle (MFA, 2008), who began as a substitute instructor in 2007 while studying at CGU and has served as gallery manager since 2008.

“The relationship between First Street Gallery and the CGU Art Department has been one of a unique exchange of ideas and influence between a diverse and driven group of artists,” Pringle said. “By featuring artists from both

programs in an exhibition that spans both program sites, this project is designed to honor that dynamic history while also elevating the partnership to new levels.”

About 40 First Street Gallery artists and 40 MFA alumni participated in *Full Circle: 25 Years of First Street Gallery & CGU Art*, including Brucker. She is currently a Los Angeles-based artist and a professor of art and art history at Loyola Marymount University (LMU).



Brucker’s artwork is informed by her experiences at the gallery, often examining memory and physical fragility in both large-scale and intimate pieces created from found objects and family heirlooms. For *Full Circle*, Brucker’s piece *Carrot Sticks*—made of cast bronze carrots and the wooden handles of her grandfather’s old tools—is featured.

Even with Brucker’s wide artistic and professional experiences, she described her three years working at the gallery as “her favorite teaching job” and “foundational to her current teaching philosophy.”

“I really believe each person should work from their strengths, and [First Street Gallery artists] had amazing strengths when it came to creativity,” she said.

Even after she left, Brucker’s connections to CGU and First Street Gallery continued. She returned to the gallery as a guest artist one summer and often attends Claremont exhibitions. Several of her former LMU students have become CGU students who also worked or volunteered at the gallery.

It truly has been “full circle.”

“Some things about First Street Gallery are always the same: people are busy working and making incredible art,” Brucker said. “And if you’re quiet, you can look in the studio and see what’s going on. You can pop in the gallery and see great work. It’s inspiring.”