

Art and politics in April

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Submitted photo

Lynn Bogert Dykstra

American Canyon's upcoming contribution to the Napa Valley Arts in April will feature a variety of local artists this year, including one woman's images of the most powerful men in U.S. politics since the 1970s.

Lynn Bogert Dykstra has spent 30 years in Washington, DC, photographing seven U.S. presidents, from Gerald Ford to Barack Obama, as well as celebrities and others.

On Saturday, Dykstra will attempt to condense her three decades of work into a 30-minute talk as the featured artist at the American Canyon Arts Foundation's 24th Annual Art Extravaganza, hosted by Jamieson Ranch Vineyards.

Her presentation, "The ART of Politics: A Photographer's Perspective," will consist of candid photographs taken of Ford, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Obama at formal and informal events held in the nation's capital from 1986 to 2016.

Dykstra grew up in Calistoga, where she was only 7 years old when she bought her first camera, a \$4 Kodak Brownie box camera at the Dime & Dollar off Main Street. Having returned to Northern California to live, Dykstra still goes back to DC for work. She was there just last week to photograph the World Affairs Council's annual gala, a job that called for taking nearly 900 images.

She says her talk on Saturday will emphasize how much the climate in Washington has changed over the course of her long career.

"We really got along [back then]," said Dykstra on Tuesday afternoon during a preview of the show at Jamieson Ranch Vineyards. Comparing the bipartisan efforts then to the very partisan politics of today, she said: "We really did [get along], and I have the pictures to prove it."

Referring to the current presidential race, she added: "I was able to photograph in an era when we were civil, and right now it's not quite as civil as it used to be."

Her career has taken her to some of the most important events in American politics. These included presidential debates held in 1988, 1992 and 1996, as well as nearly a dozen political party conventions, both Republican and Democrat.

It was at these events that Dykstra got the chance to capture so many presidents on film, and now digitally.

"This finger," she said, proudly holding up her right index finger, "has done probably a million clicks [on a shutter release button]. "I have no arthritis."

Photographing events with sitting or former presidents can be chaotic and challenging, she said, given the heightened security and protocols.

“I’ve bumped into presidents by mistake,” said Dykstra with a chuckle. “I’ve stepped on their toes, and I lived through it.”

When asked if such unintended brushes got her into trouble, she remarked: “Secret Service is great. One-on-one they’ve been polite and great to me.”

Dykstra’s talk on Saturday, which begins at 4 p.m., will be followed by a reception for her and the other 20 artists whose works were judged for the Arts Extravaganza. The winners will be announced then.

Mark Joseph, president of the American Canyon Arts Foundation and city council member, said 46 artists from Napa and Solano counties entered 151 works of art this year that ranged from paintings to sculptures.

A panel of three judges, all artists or curators themselves, paired the competition down to 53 pieces from more than 20 artists before deciding the grand prize winner and other top finishers.

The finalists’ works will be on display at Jamieson Ranch Vineyards from April 8-16.

Joseph added that many of the artists whose work won’t be shown at Jamieson Ranch will still get a viewing in American Canyon.

The Chamber of Commerce’s new Welcome Center, located just off Highway 29, is planning to feature paintings and other creations from those who didn’t make the cut for the Art Extravaganza.