



art  
with  
elders

## AWE News January 2026

*Art With Elders uses the power of art, creativity, and community to enrich the journey of aging.*

### Message from the Executive Director

Hello Friends and Family of AWE,

It's almost unimaginable that only just a year ago our organization was reeling from one of its most profound setbacks in AWE's long history. The sudden and shocking passing of our beloved Director of Operations, Jason Varner, reverberated at every level of our operation. Not only was there a gaping hole in our hearts, but I remember thinking just how dark things seemed in that moment, how ominous the road ahead looked, and how uncertain I was that we would see our way through the crisis without major disruptions.

And now, safely on the other side of it all and taking inventory, I see that, like so many occasions when presented with formidable obstacles, things often have a way of working out. Furthermore, more often than not, we are better off having endured, persevered and learned from our journeys of resilience. While Jason's passing remains deeply painful and he assuredly will forever be a monumental part of our organization and its legacy, AWE has regrouped and added new exciting dimensions to our programming.

The inspiring transformation from despair to promise shares much of what is so appreciated about Spring, which hails just around the corner. Life is uncertain, occasionally downright unforgiving, or even at times seemingly hopeless. But with a commitment to mindfulness, focus, creativity and understanding, we can expect the warmth of Spring's thaw to bring with it green shoots of hope and promise.

Those of us who regularly spend our days in AWE classrooms throughout the Bay Area with our senior constituents congregate in support of each other, engage in creative endeavors and discover new opportunities. Because of that, we are maybe just a little more well prepared for when life throws us those challenging curve balls. It requires creativity to seek brighter solutions to life's inevitable problems and AWE keeps this valuable resource primed and at arms length for many of us.

I'd like to thank our whole AWE team for pulling together to make the best of our difficult situation last year. Our board of directors, staff, instructors, volunteers and especially our students have all contributed to the unshakable foundation that supports our great mission. And a special shout out to those who will always be remembered for having left their indelible mark on the program and the good work it continues to enable.



Peace!  
Mark Campbell  
Executive Director

## AWE Teammate Spotlight: Rafael Bensuski Vieira

*Shadow Works: Field Notes on Contemporary Archaeology* explores the threshold where memory dissolves and ancient symbols reemerge, capturing the city's spirit and abstract pulse. The project originated during Vieira's years teaching art in dementia units across San Francisco with the AWE program. There, he observed a recurring shift in his students' work: as cognition faded, representational imagery gave way to abstraction—marks reminiscent of early human expression and ritual forms.

Drawing on Jungian psychology, Vieira frames these images as manifestations of the collective unconscious. Recurring motifs—sun wheels, eight-pointed stars, and cross-like bodily forms—reference humanity's earliest attempts to situate itself within nature and the cosmos. From this foundation, *Shadow Works* expands into a meditation on topophilia—the emotional bonds between people and place—and humanity's primal impulse to leave a mark.

Working beyond the traditional studio, Vieira conducts nocturnal, site-responsive field studies throughout the city, navigating its poetics of space with a backpack and push cart of materials. These temporary interventions are shaped by erosion, weather, and time, as natural forces further abstract the landscape, softening and erasing man-made structures and returning sites to ambiguity.

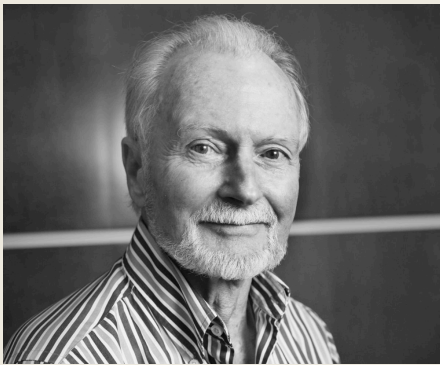
Vieira studied contemporary art at the San Francisco Art Institute, where interdisciplinary approaches and Bay Area abstract thinkers shaped a practice that continues to push the boundaries of memory, place, and symbolic expression. His work has been exhibited at MONCA, Santa Anna Exhibitions, Marin MOCA, the University of Guadalajara, the SFMOMA Artists Gallery, MCCLA, and San Francisco City Hall.



*"Shadow Works" by Rafael Vieira*



## In Memoriam - Richard Williams



*"Stony Cliff" by Richard Williams*



Born in Ypsilanti, Michigan, Richard grew up in Wisconsin, went to Northwestern University, and performed in live theatre, mostly comedies and musicals, for twenty years. His favorite character was playing King Arthur in Camelot.

Richard returned to school for an MFA in ceramics and came to California planning to become a potter. He worked in San Francisco's Castro district for thirty years as one of the managers of a non-profit studio for ceramic artists – Ruby's Clay Studio – where he had a studio.

Richard, who described himself as a positive person and a peacemaker, started painting later in life in his AWE class at The Sequoias. He was an avid participant for many years, painting stunning landscapes of some of his favorite spot and exhibiting his work with AWE frequently, often choosing to donate his work to the AWE program.

In his words, "You're never too old to discover new things."



"Mythical Venice" by Richard Williams



"California Sunset" by Richard Williams

## Classes News

### Coming Soon

Starting March 3, 2026, AWE will offer "*Pieces of Us - Exploring Identity Through Mixed Media*" an 8-week workshop hosted by **Ruth's Table** 3160 21st St. SF, CA.

In celebration of Pride, this 8-week mixed media workshop invites older adults to explore identity through layering, symbolism, and material exploration. Our identities are made up of many pieces, memories, experiences, contradictions, and quiet truths, shaped both by who we are as individuals and by the communities we belong to.

Using a wide range of accessible materials, participants will explore how images, textures, colors, and marks can come together to tell layered visual stories. The class includes gentle guidance, material demonstrations, and playful experimentation, along with practical tips and techniques to support each participant's creative process.

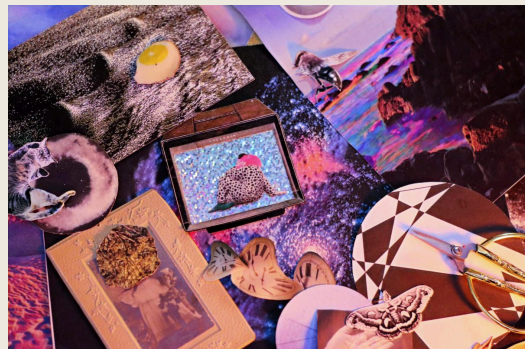
This class is open to all experience levels and emphasizes curiosity, self-expression, and creative freedom. Participants will create mixed media artwork to be featured in Ruth's Table's Pride exhibition in June.

Tuesdays 3/3/26 - 4/21/26, 3:30PM - 5:30PM

Hosted by **Ruth's Table** 3160 21st St. SF, CA.

With AWE Teaching Artist **Aimée Duddridge-Picard**

Contact [darcie@artwithelders.org](mailto:darcie@artwithelders.org) to sign up



Mixed media with Aimee Duddridge-Picard

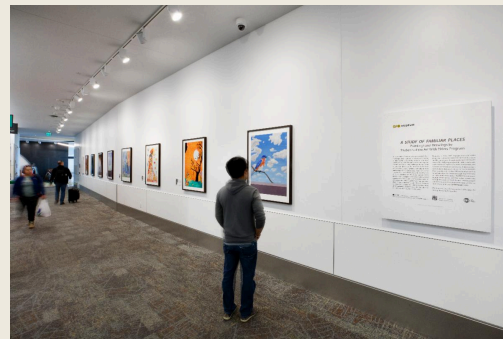
## [AWE at the SFO Museum – A Study of Familiar Places](#)

5/9/25 – 5/9/26

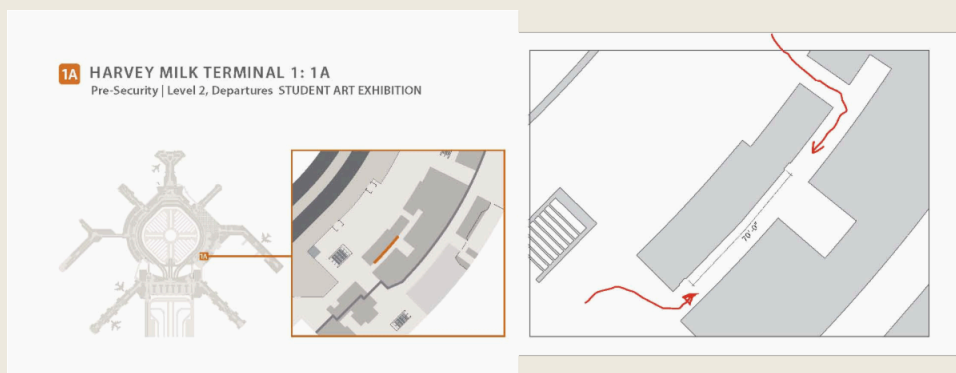
**SF International Airport – Presecurity in Harvey Milk Terminal 1\*, Departures Level 2, Gallery 1A – See map below**

A “*Study of Familiar Places*” brings together works that expand the notion of travel and challenge the age limit imposed on discovery. The exhibiting artists embrace the curious traveler’s mentality in their studied approach to place, position, and perspective. From farmer to museum curator, from El Salvador to China, from amateur to lifelong creative, these artists personify the rich mosaic of older adults in the San Francisco Bay Area and beyond.

\*Last month, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization awarded SFO’s Harvey Milk Terminal 1 its top prize for airports, The Prix Versailles. The prize recognizes achievements in creativity and innovation while also considering ecological, social and cultural impact (SF Chronicle Jan. 17, 2026).



Left - cover art “Queue” by Richard Newman - AWE Open Studios. Above - Exhibit at SFO Museum



## **SF Women Artists Gallery**

The women of AWE are featured in the Salon at [SF Women Artists Gallery](#), 647 Irving St. SF, CA  
The show runs 1/6 - 2/27/2026



## Art Classes = Health Benefits

Engaging in art classes has many health benefits! Learn more in these informative article from the [Art Newspaper](#) and [The Guardian](#).

“Over time, regular arts engagement can strengthen connectivity between brain regions and even increase the volume of grey matter. In fact, amateur musicians and artists have stronger connections between parts of the brain that are vulnerable to ageing, and are identifiable in brain images as “younger”.”

## Stay Updated with Our Latest Exhibits and Classes News

Please visit the [AWE Exhibits Schedule](#) and [AWE Classes page](#) on our website for more info.

# Thank You Donors!

**Please consider making a donation**  
***Your gift makes a huge difference***  
***in the lives of our students!***

Art With Elders appreciates all of our supporters. Together we are truly changing the lives of hundreds of Bay Area seniors. We strive to open hearts and minds to new worlds, new discoveries, new joys, and subsequently, fresh meaning in life.

**Thanks again to all of our donors for making this work possible!**



## AWE Staff and Artist Instructors

**Row 1 L-R:** Crystal Booth, Yvette Brown, Mark Campbell, Insio Che, Yan Chen, Aimée Duddridge-Picard, Mei Mei Everson, Keesje Fischer, Santiago Gervasi. **Row 2 L-R:** Sergio Giovine, Dmitry Grudsky, Iris Hu, Virginia Jourdan, Dulama LeGrande, Min Lee, Hugh Leeman, Megan Majestic, Natalie Quek. **Row 3 L-R:** Andrew Mills, Darcie O'Brien, Miranda Putman, Betty Rothaus, Maïté St. Clair, Patrick St. Clair, Rafael Vieira, Stephanie Vlahov



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