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SFMOMA

Museum showcases collection of 75 years

Old and new holdings featured in exhibits

By Sura Wood
For the Mercury News

SAN FRANCISCO — These are exhilarating days for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. The museum, founded in 1935 in the midst of the Great Depression, has grown into a world-class institution, and it marks its 75th anniversary next month.

To commemorate that milestone, it is presenting a series of shows over the next year celebrating the depth and breadth of its collection of paintings, photography and sculpture, as well as architecture and design.

Assembled under the title, "75 Years of Looking Forward," four of the anniversary exhibitions launch in January and run throughout most of next year. In addition, a partnership with the late founder of the Gap, Donald Fisher, announced last fall, allows SFMOMA to exhibit some 1,000 works from his private collection. The public will get their first peek at one of the world's greatest holdings of 20th- and 21st-century art in June.

In "The Anniversary Show," which opened last week and continues through Jan. 16, 2011, the museum pauses to reflect on its storied past. Taking up the entire second floor, showcasing more than 400 works and divided into 16 sections, it surveys

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'The Anniversary Show' Through: Jan. 16, 2011

Where: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 151 Third St.

Admission: \$15, \$9 students with ID and ages 65 and older, free ages 12 and younger when accompanied by an adult; free to all Jan. 16-18, 6 to 8:45 p.m. Thursdays and the first Tuesday of each month; 415-357-4000, www.sfmoma.org



Jyoti Yelagalawadi is director of Lekha Publishing.

Young wordsmiths

San Jose writing school encourages students to find their 'inner voice'

By Karen D'Souza
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On the eve of her literary debut, Alexandra Saii feels serious qualms about having fame thrust upon her in the manner of J.K. Rowling or Stephenie Meyer. The budding author is so concerned about the pressures of celebrity that she has even considered using a pseudonym. She can't bear the thought of going through life hounded by legions of sleazy TMZ-style paparazzi.

"I want to write, but I don't want to be famous," explains the 10-year-old San Jose scribe, hands on her hips as she speaks. "I'm a little nervous about that. I don't want to have to wear a disguise just to go get a smoothie or something, but the problem is I do want to get credit."

Torn by the conundrum, Alexandra has decided to take her chances with the limelight, putting her real name to two short stories that will soon be published by San Jose's Lekha Publishers, an arm of the Lekha School of Creative

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JOSIE LEPE — MERCURY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS

"It's really fun because I get to use my imagination," 10-year-old Alexandra Saii, above, says of her budding writing career. Her work is included in a new anthology by Lekha Publishers.

LEKHA TITLES

Check out the children's books Lekha Publishers of San Jose has to offer on its Web site: www.lekhapublishers.com/books.php.

"Adventures of the Imagination 2006-2008: Stories, Poetry, Plays & More: An anthology of student work, 47 authors" (2008)

"A Journey in Time" by Tyler Sadoff (2009)

"Adventures of the Imagination 2008-2009: Stories, Poetry, Plays & More: An anthology of student work, more than 60 authors" (2009)

I discovered
... that the West Coast has a love affair with Amtrak's Coast Starlight train — no empty seats either way.

Pat Gerard
Santa Clara

In Silicon Valley, about yourself, along your travels. Finish this sentence and send it to discover@mercurynews.com. "Recently, I discovered..."

Male Call
Advice from a guy

Male Call will return Jan. 3.

Attending to details would improve Xanh

Dining experience needs additional focus on quality, not quantity

By Jennifer Graue
For the Mercury News

I noticed the big, brown stain on the side of the white tablecloth at the next table about halfway through my first visit to Xanh. How, I wondered, could a restaurant that

restaurantreview

clearly has put a lot of effort into its appearance permit something so unsightly?

It wouldn't even be worth mentioning except that Xanh is one of those restaurants where the focus tends to be on style over substance.

Xanh is on the north end of Castro Street in downtown Mountain View, where it moved early last year into a much larger space that nearly tripled its seating. Amanda Pham,



NHAT V. MEYER — MERCURY NEWS

Thuy Pham is chef and co-owner of Xanh in Mountain View.

the younger half of the mother-daughter team that owns and operates the restaurant, designed the new space, which is sleek, hip and modern. It draws a crowd of mainly

20- and 30-somethings, who gather for the weeknight happy hour in the expansive bar and lounge, which, like two of the dining rooms, is bathed in blue light. Green lights

Xanh
110 Castro St.
Mountain View
650-964-1888
★½

twinkle above a third dining area, the color scheme a clear tribute to the restaurant's name: Xanh means both blue and green in Vietnamese.

The menu at Xanh is vast. Chef Thuy Pham has plucked regional specialties from all over her native Vietnam — from the pho of Hanoi to the clay pot catfish of the Mekong Delta — and put her own spin on these dishes. Occasionally her fusion-fare works, but other times it doesn't. By paring down the extensive menu, Chef Pham could focus on the dishes she does best and leave diners consistently delighted, instead of occasionally disappointed.

Our first disappointment came before the food ever made it to the

See XANH, Page 10

School

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Writing, which showcases stories for kids.

Her mother, Rozita Saii, credits Lekha's nurturing environment — it's half publishing house (launched in 2002), half writing camp (started in 2006) — with giving her daughter pride in her storytelling prowess as well as a formidable sense of self.

"She has always loved to read and write, so we wanted to give it a try. It has definitely made her much more confident. Now she is very sure of herself and her writing," Saii says. "Getting published is tangible proof of what she has accomplished."

Jyoti Yelagalawadi, founder of Lekha ("writing" in Sanskrit) has long believed in the transformative power of exposing children to literature. In the "writing grotto" located in the back of her San Jose house, the mother of two lets her wordsmiths sit under the table and play with the cat (a friendly tabby named Misha, who shows up in many a short story) as they find their literary voice. At the height of summer, she has about 500 ethnically diverse students, ranging from 7-year-olds to teens, but she acknowledges that only 35 or 40 of her students are truly serious about the craft.

"We want to share the beauty of writing with children," says Yelagalawadi, 44, who has written several books for children, including "Laugh With Dinosaurs" and "Deep Sea Creatures." "Some of them might grow up to be authors. But even if they become scientists or engineers, they will always have that creative spark."

Alexandra, for one, is so disciplined she doesn't have time for TV or computers. She powers through her homework as fast as she can so that she can devote all of her spare time to writing.

She is among 60 children featured in Lekha's new anthology, "Adventures of the Imagination 2008-2009: Stories, Poetry, Plays & More."

One of her stories, "The Evil Smiley Face," is the fantastical tale of the planet Omigosh, ruled by the despotic Lord Smiley, who has a nasty habit of casting spells on vegetarians. The other, "Count Dogula," chronicles the life and times of a doggie vampire.

"I think they're pretty good,

and they deserve to be published," says Alexandra, who already has started work on a novel, a comedy of middle-school manners tentatively titled "The Sassy Divas." "I want to write stories that are realistic, but I also want them to be funny. It's really fun because I get to use my imagination."

"She loves to write," Yelagalawadi says, standing amid crayons, board games and children's books. "I look for children like that, children with that light in their eyes." Teaching children to follow their own muse is the first step toward a lifetime of critical thinking, says Santa Clara County poet laureate Nils Peterson.

When you've "learned to love to read, you've been given the gift of being able to create your own consciousness," Petersen says. "You're not at the mercy of your teachers. You've become your own teacher."

Morgan Hill 13-year-old Tyler Sadoff was first out of the gate with his sci-fi adventure "A Journey in Time," which came out this year. (While the school foots the bill for its student anthologies, parents have to pick up the tab if they want to self-publish their child's manuscript. The cost is about \$4,500 for 500 copies.)

Several projects are slated to hit the presses in 2010, including "The Mystery of the Poisoned Cookie," the first in a series of novels about pooch private eyes by Mountain View 12-year-old Sruthi Jayakumar, and the tentatively titled coming-of-age story "Article" by Santa Clara 13-year-old Deepa Sridhar. Yelagalawadi's 16-year-old daughter, Varija, is also working on an existential riff called "I Play God." All of the works will be available on Lekha's Web site.

Yelagalawadi hopes that these projects will inspire other youngsters to write. There are so many distractions besetting Silicon Valley children in the iPhone age that she fears some children never learn to cultivate their personal sense of creativity.

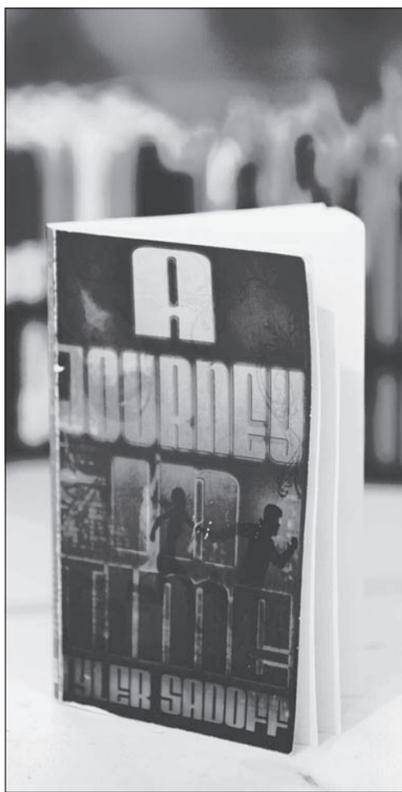
"If you watch too much TV and play too many video games, you start to lose your own sense of imagination. We try to get children to listen to their inner voice," Yelagalawadi says. "What is your heart saying? What is your soul saying? That is how you make a writer."

Contact Karen D'Souza at 408-271-3772. Check out her theater reviews, features and blog at www.mercurynews.com/karen-dsouza.



JOSIE LEPE — MERCURY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS

Lekha Publishing has published this anthology of writing by young people.



Tyler Sadoff, 13 of Morgan Hill, wrote this sci-fi book "A Journey in Time."

3 things to do today

Film

'Robin Hood' at the California

The Hollywood classic "Robin Hood" will be presented at the California Theatre at 1 and 6 p.m. today, complete with classic cartoons and live accompaniment on a Wurlitzer organ. California Theatre, 345 S. First St., San Jose. \$5. www.sanjose.org/wintermovies.

Music

Le Boeuf Brothers at Don Quixote's

New York City-based experimental jazz duo the Le Boeuf

Brothers bring their hip-hop, R&B and alternative rock-influenced music to Felton, 7 tonight. Don Quixote's Music Hall, 6275 Highway 9. \$10. 831-603-2294. www.donquixotesmusic.info.

Comedy

Jon Lovitz at Cobb's in S.F.

Catch funnyman Jon Lovitz at Cobb's Comedy Club, 8 tonight and Monday, 915 Columbus Ave., San Francisco. \$30.50, two-drink minimum. 415-928-4320. www.cobbscomedy.com.

— Melinda Rios, Mercury News

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