

Ojai is a Place Where the Feminine Spirit Flowers, Creates and Inspires

By Nancy Gross

(Excerpted from the Fall Ojai Valley Visitors Guide)

This year when I saw the graceful, eye-catching pale pink lilies (so called ‘naked ladies’ because of their leaf-less stems) that sway around the Ojai Valley in late summer, they seemed to me symbols of the ways Ojai is a



place that nurtures the feminine sensibility, while the feminine in turn enriches Ojai. One way this feminine component to Ojai’s “vibe” shows is in the way we as a community treasure our natural resources and limit big chains from aggressively taking over. Like a mother hen we protect our quiet neighborhoods, our wide fringe of orchards, our shady oaks and our architectural gems. Yet our valley is receptive to those who come to sink respectful roots into her lush peace and wisdom, bringing forth their unique, authentic blossoms. Many entrepreneurs find sustenance here, men and women, and cooperation and community feather the Ojai nest that

encourages the imagination. Two enterprising women who are putting down roots and bearing blooms in Ojai are Art Medicine Woman, Aviva Gold, and a winemaker who sees herself becoming a healer, Angela Osborne.

Aviva Gold’s apartment snuggles between two Mimosa trees; she told me she brews the blossoms into tea, a practice out of Chinese medicine. Aviva has an MFA in painting, and also holds degrees in psychotherapy and art therapy. She has studied with shamans around the world and is herself established internationally as an Art Medicine Woman. Before coming to Ojai she lived in New York’s Hudson Valley, doing her work there for 16 years, including holding workshops at New York City’s Open Center. Aviva leads workshop participants through a process of painting where the process counts, rather than the goal. She helps her students reach deep into their unconscious selves, and into the commonalities of our human unconscious, bringing insights and healing in much way we process our lives in our dreams. Her achievements include a book, *Painting From The Source: Awakening the Artist Soul in Everyone*, published by Harper Collins, and a

DVD instructional where interviews of Aviva from major TV networks can be found in the special features. In spite of successes, Aviva states, “It took moving here to discover how really right this place is for me. Most people my age are thinking about retiring and I realized [a deeper portion of] my work has yet to begin.”

Being in Ojai places Aviva relatively close to Esalen, in Big Sur, where she leads process painting retreats twice a year. It was from working there that she began to explore the central California coast in search of a climate-friendly place to relocate. She had heard of Ojai over the years, but had forgotten about it. When a friend from Santa Barbara suggested they take a day trip to Ojai, the name reemerged. Hiking up a trail called *The Spine of the Dragon* at the Ojai Foundation was somehow foundational of this new epoch for Aviva. She visited a few more times, once staying in a yurt at the Foundation and another time staying in a cabin up in Matilija Canyon. She was thoroughly seduced, drawn by this moon’s nest, this magnet. She moved here three years ago.

Having found a base out west, she is beginning work in Hawaii. She would also like to find a center in Los Angeles that might host her soul-healing creative endeavors. And now that she is in the backyard of Los Angeles and the movie industry, she’s inspired to begin writing down a movie idea that has been germinating within her for eleven years. The work she feels she is just beginning has to do with helping to balance years of patriarchal energy and their impact on the planet and on individuals with positive feminine energies that have been neglected in the West for centuries. Her movie is intended for healing the world. I have been privileged to hear some of the film’s plot and it is indeed lovely, suspenseful, powerful, timely and big box office material, not an easy combination to come by.

I enjoyed visiting with Aviva on her sun-dappled back patio as she finished what looked like a delicious healthy breakfast of nuts and seeds and melon. Aviva’s spiritual sensibility—gentle, funny, brazen and bold all at the same time—shows itself tuned into the pulse of the world. One other thing she likes about Ojai is that the older feminine is respected and appreciated here. We are fortunate to have her, and this fall she will be leading a process painting workshop at our own Camp Ramah on October 24-26. She will also be guiding students in her healing art six Tuesday mornings at Suzie’s Art Playhouse on Drown Street, a series she expects will be ongoing. For more information please visit www.paintingfromthesource.com, and you can email Aviva at info@paintingfromthesource.com.