

An Olympic Paint Job with a Highlands Twist

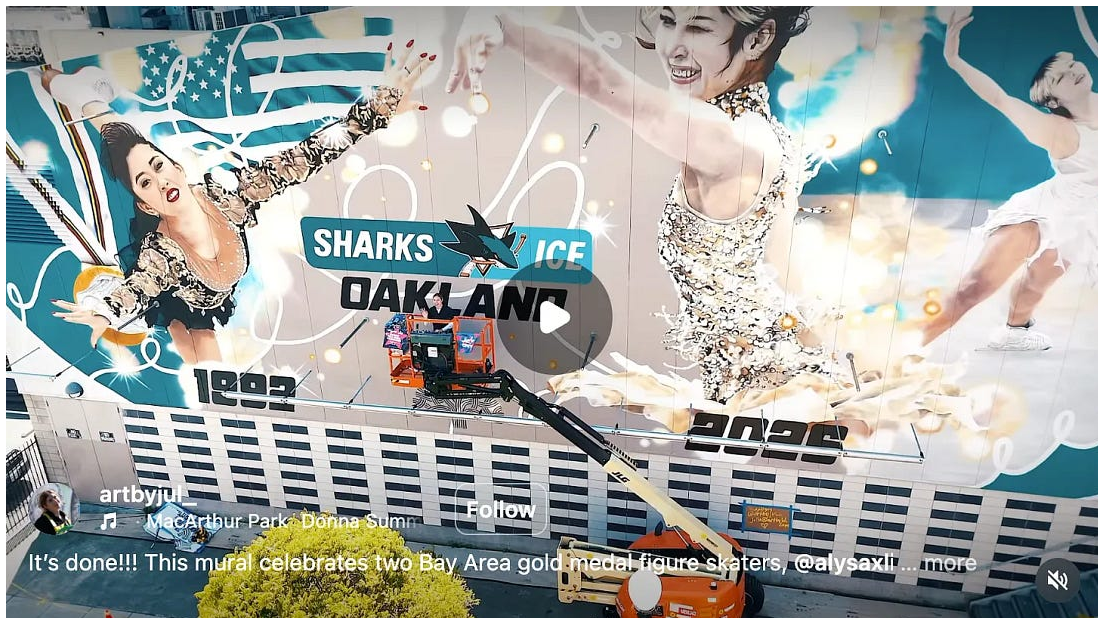
Artist Julie Engelmann grew up in the Highlands, and you can now find her murals across the Bay Area



GORDON STRAUSE

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When driving on 18th Street in Oakland past the entrance to the Oakland Ice Center, if you look up you will suddenly see a giant mural of Alysa Liu and Kristi Yamaguchi, the women's figure skating Olympic gold medalists of 2026 and 1992, who both trained in Oakland at the Ice Center.



Julie Engelmann waving to the camera in front of her completed mural. Click through for a full drone's eye view on Instagram

But what connects this work to our neighborhood is that the artist, Julie Engelmann, grew up here in the Highlands and her parents, Kim and Tim, still live in the neighborhood.

Developing a love for oceans and art

When the Engelmann family moved to their house on Brandywine Lane in the 1990s, Julie began attending Highlands Elementary and soon realized she was an “art kid” who jumped at any opportunity to paint and to craft. She also joined the Highlands swim team and soon developed a love both for the water in general and oceans in particular. Together those loves of art and the ocean put her on the path she is on today.



Julie showing off one of her earliest works at Highlands Elementary and smiling after swim practice at the Rec

After graduating from Aragon in 2013, Julie attended Azusa Pacific University in Los Angeles, where she took advantage of the easy access to the ocean to become a surfer and diver (both SCUBA and free diving). She also studied philosophy and psychology and graduated after only three years. She had become interested in Kant and questions of free will and consciousness which she studied for a year at Oxford.

But upon returning to America, she actually found a way to combine her psychology and diving background into an amazing internship with the Navy where she worked on an experimental program to train dolphins and sea lions to detect mines.

After that, however, she returned to the Bay Area, where her love for the ocean brought her to Half Moon Bay where she found work in surf shops. And while she had been painting recreationally on the side all along, the surf shop work helped lead to some of her first paying work as an artist: painting surfboards. In addition, she began selling her paintings as well, and she now maintains her own studio space and gallery off of Main Street in Half Moon Bay.



Julie's studio in Half Moon Bay

Becoming a muralist

Julie's first opportunity to paint a mural came when Half Moon Bay gave a number of aspiring muralists the opportunity to paint the skater's ramp at Surfer's Beach in Half Moon Bay. Julie realized she loved the opportunity and challenge of painting outdoors and at large scale, and her success with the Half Moon Bay mural, plus experience working with the Filipino graffiti artist and muralist Allison Torneros Tinati (known professionally as Hueman) at her studio in Oakland led to many other opportunities.

Julie has now painted murals in Colma, Daly City, Pacifica, Placerville, Princeton Landing, San Francisco, and Santa Cruz as well as Half Moon Bay, with her clients including both city governments and private commissions for restaurants, athletic clubs, and landscaping firms.



San Bruno Natural History Mural



Historical Placerville Mural



Half Moon Bay Mural

But the painting in Oakland is both the biggest work that Julie has ever painted and perhaps the most entrepreneurial project she has ever completed as well. Julie was inspired by Alysa Liu's performance at the Olympic Games in February, impressed not only by Liu's incredible performance and courage under pressure but also by her personal style and commitment to both living her life and skating her way. When Julie found out that Alysa had trained in Oakland, she approached the Ice Center about creating an art piece commemorating her, and when she saw the giant blank wall near the Center entrance and learned that Yamaguchi had skated there as well, her path was set. The project took four full weeks of non-stop work to complete, but the results are breathtaking.



And newsworthy as well.



Further Reading:

<https://www.artbyjul.com/>

https://www.instagram.com/artbyjul_/?hl=en

<https://www.paloaltoonline.com/ae/2025/01/02/marveling-at-murals-meet-the-half-moon-bay-artist-behind-vibrant-public-paintings-around-the-peninsula/>

<https://oaklandside.org/2026/03/27/another-alyssa-liu-mural-in-oakland-this-one-with-kristi-yamaguchi/>

https://www.mtdemocrat.com/news/bringing-beauty-to-broadway/article_efda0b38-452f-11ef-8e48-137e4115907d.html