# 2025 Distinguished Artist Submission

#1 Jean J Zuo

### Threads that bind us

As a wildlife photographer, my work is rooted in the quiet moments of connection between humans, animals, and the landscapes we share. For me, those threads come together in Rancho San Antonio Open Space Preserve—a sanctuary where I have spent countless hours observing the resilience, vulnerability, and beauty of California's native wildlife. This preserve is more than just land; it is a tapestry of life, woven with threads that bind us all to the natural world.

The three pieces I have chosen for this distinguished Artist Award Application reflect those threads. The first captures a Bobcat with a freshly caught ground squirrel. It is a moment of raw survival, reminding us of the fragile yet essential connections in the web of life. Predation, though difficult to witness, is one of the binding threads that ensures balance and diversity within an ecosystem.

The second image shows a Lazuli Bunting, a migratory songbird that pauses here during its long journey. Perched among spring blooms, it sings—a fleeting, hopeful note carried across borders and seasons. Its presence illustrates another binding thread: the way open spaces connect distant places and species, offering safe passage to travelers who depend on them.

The third image portrays the endangered Black Rail, a secretive bird that has found refuge here. Its survival in this space highlights the importance of protecting fragile habitats. In safeguarding the rail's home, we preserve a rare thread in the larger fabric of biodiversity—ensuring that its story continues to be woven into the landscape for generations to come.

Together, these photographs illustrate how Rancho San Antonio embodies the threads that bind predator and prey, resident and migrant, human and wild. It is a place of survival, of song, of sanctuary. Just as it provides a home for wildlife, it offers people a refuge for the spirit—a place to pause, breathe, and reconnect with something larger than ourselves.

Through my photography, I hope to honor those threads. By capturing these fleeting moments, I strive to inspire others to see the interconnectedness of our world and to recognize that the survival of these species is inseparable from our own. Rancho San Antonio is not just open space; it is the living fabric that binds us all together.

## About the Artist

I am a Cupertino-based wildlife photographer who finds deep joy in observing and documenting the natural world. Please see more of my artworks at: <a href="jeanzuo.com">jeanzuo.com</a>. My camera is a tool not only for art but also for storytelling—sharing the beauty, resilience, and vulnerability of the species that live among us. I believe open spaces like Rancho San Antonio are vital threads that bind wildlife and people, offering both a home for animals and a sanctuary for the human spirit. My mission is to inspire others to see these connections and to nurture the landscapes that sustain them.

Jean J. Zuo is an award-winning wildlife photographer and artist who transitioned from a successful career in the high-tech industry, driven by a lifelong passion for nature. Drawing on a background in leadership and innovation, she brings both precision and creativity to her art, capturing the beauty and fragility of the natural world in ways that inspire awareness, connection, and conservation.

# **ART AWARDS, RECOGNITIONS & WORK EXPERIENCE**

2025 National Park Foundation "Share the Experience" Photo Contest, 2nd Place winner. National Park Foundation announcement

April 2025 <u>California State Senate Floor Exhibition and Recognition</u> by Senator Josh Becker (13th District).

**2024** California Wildlife Photo of the Year. Covered by <u>KRON4</u> and <u>Mercury News</u>.

2023 NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries "Get Into Your Sanctuary" Photo Contest, 2nd Place winner. National Marine Sanctuaries announcement.

# Cisco Systems, Inc., San Jose, CA 95134

5/2010 – 4/2018 Manager, Business Operations & Strategy – L@Cisco Collaborate with Corporate Legal, Worldwide Channels, marketing and platform teams to redesign a 15-year old training distribution program into a market enablement model to support a new digital strategy of \$10M+ (annual) revenue. Re-negotiate the training enablement term and trim down vendor cost by 70% (\$3M to \$900K per year) by automating internal fulfillment processes. Oversee vendor's work and maintain a trust & reliable relationship.

8/2004 – 4/2010 IOS Release Program Manager – Software Engineering
Own and manage the complex next generation routing/switching technology
software release process. Activities include branch and test strategy formation
and take the concepts to execution commits, weekly builds and compilation

failure analysis and repair follow-up, code sync and scheduling coordination, code commit criteria definition and enforcement, subsequent test initiation and results tracking and analysis, web publishing of key dates and progresses, etc.

1/1997 – 7/2004 Product Manager – Cisco 36x0 and 26x0 Product Families

Interface with field, channel and engineering to define new features and functionality for new product releases. Create strategies and concepts in marketing new products. Obtain buy-in from management and development team through product concept and execution commits.

Drive committed projects towards FCS (first customer ship); ensure release schedules for all functional areas at every project milestone.

Brief potential customers at the executive level of 2600 and 3600 solutions (billion \$\$ annual run rate) on a regular basis.

## **EDUCATION**

Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, CA Master of Business Administration (MBA)

San Jose State University, San Jose, CA

Bachelor of Science, Electrical Engineering - graduated with Distinction ETA KAPPA NU Member – Electrical Engineering Honor Society The TAU BETA PI Member – National Engineering Honor Society

**Professional Engineering Certificate** (XE073778)

**Stanford University**, Palo Alto, CA Change Management in Organization

The George Washington University, Washington DC Associate's Certificate in project Management

Cupertino, CA 95014

To the Selection Committee,

My name is Teresa Cheng and I have been a resident of Cupertino for over 25 years. With a BA in Applied Mathematics from Harvard and a Ph. D. in Operations Research from UCLA, I moved to the Bay Area to work in the Systems Performance Group at Northern Telecom. When the internet bubble burst in 2000, I accepted a layoff package and decided to stay home to raise our two children. At that point I became passionate about photographing children, acting as the unofficial photographer at neighborhood birthday parties and school events. As my son and daughter grew older and left for college, I began to look for other subjects to photograph. I met Jean Zuo in 2021, in the midst of the pandemic, at Rancho San Antonio, my neighborhood park. We were both observing and photographing a family of Great Horned Owls. At that point she was a friendly, petite woman who carried a tripod and a camera with a huge lens. It would take me a few years to get to know her better.

Meanwhile I became more involved in the birding world, volunteering for the Santa Clara Valley Bird Alliance by managing their photo archive and curating a series of image galleries to encourage engagement by photographers and artists, and as a way of improving the quality and diversity of photos in the photo archive.

Jean Zuo is a talented, dedicated and ethical Wildlife Photographer. In this age when many people can afford fancy digital cameras that can capture amazing action and detail, Jean sets herself apart as an artist. She has an eye for light and composition, and a vision of the image she wants to capture. She's willing to work hard for an image, traveling long distances by car or even plane, hiking with her heavy gear, and then waiting for hours in uncomfortable conditions to capture the images she wants. Last winter she heard about Snowy Owls on a beach in Long Island, New York. Wanting photographs of a Snowy Owl on the sand, she reached out to the local birding community to find detailed information on the location, flew to New York, drove to the nearest parking spot, and then trekked 2.5 miles in soft sand with her heavy gear before sunrise to find the Snowy Owl. Then, since she wanted more opportunities, she drove out and made the same trek the following morning! For her efforts, she was rewarded with some wonderful photos. Here are a few examples.





Some of my favorite of Jean's photos are ones of birds on water. She makes sure to shoot from as low a possible, either by laying flat on the ground or sitting at the edge of the water with the camera resting on the ground and photographing using the viewfinder. This allows her to get a low perspective improving the bokeh and providing an intimate bird's eye view of the scene. Here are some examples:







Jean is well respected in the Wildlife Photography community and often photographs with a group of friends. I recently spent a week in Ohio with her photographing migrating warblers and found her to be a congenial, cooperative, and accommodating travel companion. That trip also demonstrated her work ethic, since she stayed up until 1:00 or 1:30 am every night reviewing her photographs despite needing to get up early the next morning. This effort was worth it because she was able to use the information from each previous day to fine-tune what she wanted to do the next day -- which birds to pursue, which locations had the best light and when, what techniques worked the best, etc...

Jean created, administers, and moderates the Wildlife America Facebook Group. This is a private group with the description: *Digital Photography and videography are wonderful art forms as the visual feedback is instant. Technology improves by the month, and the pursuit of the capture is a thrill. In this group, we share our own sightings, pictures, and videos of wildlife throughout America. If you post others' works, please do get permission first and please also credit the author(s).* She encourages participation by a diverse group of photographers, and it's a place where she shares her photos. There are currently 261 members in the group which has been going strong for over five years. This group provides a safe, supportive space for a community of photographers from all over the country to interact, provide feedback and exchange ideas.

Jean is an accomplished Wildlife Photographer who has won significant awards: 2nd prize in the Sanctuary Life category of the 2023 NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries "Get Into Your Sanctuary" Contest, winner of the 2024 California Wildlife Photo of the Year, and 2nd place (out of nearly 7000 entries) in the 2024 National Park Foundation "Share the Experience" Contest.

I strongly support Jean Zuo's application for Cupertino's 2025 Distinguished Artist Award. She's already a talented, recognized Wildlife Photographer, but with her determination and work ethic, she will only improve over time.

Regards,

Teresa Cheng







# 2025 Distinguished Artist Submission

#2 Elaine Chen

# Elaine Chen's Personal Statement

Art is both my job and my hobby. I am an art teacher, as well as an artist who draws things for the entertainment industry. So the art I make from this job is to help teach and help people discover their own ideas. However, as a hobby I draw things for myself. I draw things that comfort me. That I would be happy to draw. Though this is more of a recent thing; I hope that me being an art teacher, and also drawing things that I want to draw, will inspire upcoming artists to have passion in their own works. To draw things that they want to draw and not what they think they should.

That's why my goal as an artist is to give people entertainment and comfort through the art that I make. I don't think art needs a deep meaning. As long as it makes people happy I think that's good enough for me. I hold these ideas since art was my way of escape and something I've heavily relied on for comfort. So that's why I like filling up fantastical worlds with characters and telling comforting stories through them, in hope of spreading this idea and this goal.

One last thing is that I like to collaborate with friends. I find digital art to be the easiest media to work with for this reason. Online it is easier to work together to send files and collage them together. By combining everyone's different strengths we are able to create games, animation and comics. Stuff that I think is really fun! I like working together with people!

Selection Committee Emerging Artist Award

Dear Members of the Selection Committee,

It is with great enthusiasm that I recommend Elaine Chen for the Emerging Artist Award. As both a frequent collaborator and friend, I am always blown away by her commitment to her craft and the community around her.

Elaine demonstrates both technical skill and imaginative vision. Her work reflects a painstaking attention to detail that I've had the honor of witnessing as a longtime collaborator. Throughout our many works together, she has always placed a heavy emphasis on creating intentionality with each and every stroke of the brush. Each piece never ceases to amaze me.

Skills aside, what strikes me most about Elaine is her pursuit of growth. In one particular summer, she challenged herself to draw over a thousand hands and feet within the span of a few months. She has consistently displayed a relentless drive to learn, which is a rare quality in today's fast-paced world.

Furthermore, Elaine has always sought to give back to her community. Over the past few years, she's dedicated her time and skills to summer camps and after-school programs. In this time, her humility and openness to help others on their paths genuinely makes her shine as not only an artist, but an individual.

I firmly believe that Elaine embodies the very spirit of the Emerging Artist Award: a combination of artistic promise and the drive to further develop her voice. Recognizing her work at this stage will encourage her to reach new creative heights and continue inspiring others through her art.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I strongly support Elaine's candidacy for this award and am confident she will make a lasting impact as an artist.

Sincerely, Audrey Kong Writer, Filmmaker





