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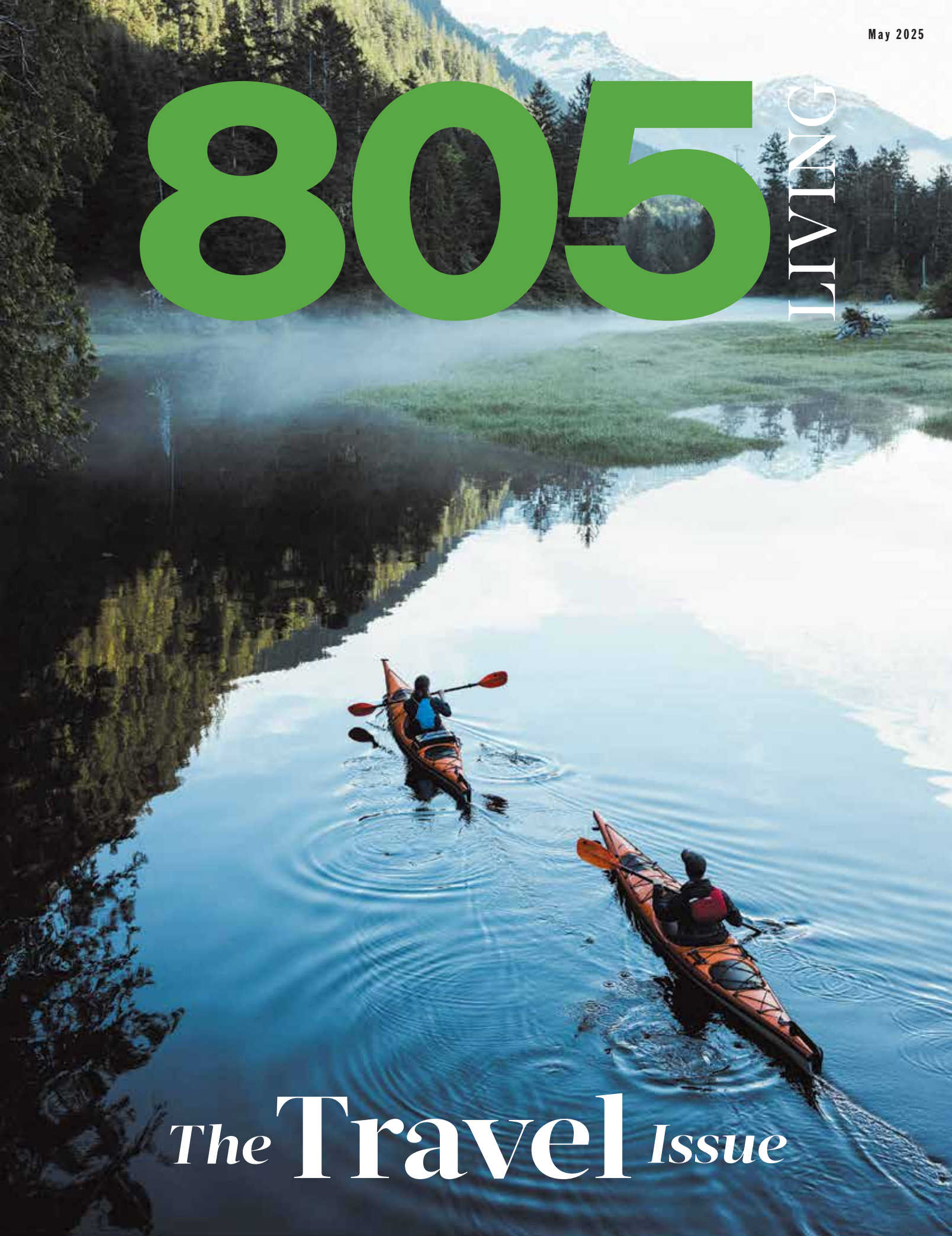

The Travel Issue

By Joan Tapper

Memory Pieces

LOAN CHABANOL EXPLORES A LONG-AGO EMOTIONAL CONNECTION IN HER PAINTINGS.

A woman of many talents, Loan Chabanol pursued a modeling and acting career while continuing to work on the art she'd begun studying during her youth in France.

The title of Loan Chabanol's exhibit at Santa Barbara's Tamsen Gallery—*Reminiscence*—immediately signals that there's a nostalgic psychological component to these paintings. Combining strong lines and a light, airy palette, the art is partly figurative, evoking slightly enigmatic equine images. But Chabanol is forthcoming about the genesis of the work.

"I was remembering a moment I'd forgotten," she says. Born in Paris, she was 12 years old and living in the southwest of France when her father died. "I struggled with emotions," she recalls, "and I'd ride my bike to a horse field and sit for an hour. I thought the horse would tell me something. The images go back to that period. They represent a moment of time when I felt I needed something else—freedom, hope."

For those who know Chabanol as a model and actress, the exhibit may come as a bit of a surprise. But she's always painted. "It was the only thing I was good at in school," she says. Her teacher was the >

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French painter Bernard Bistes, who also was responsible for changing her life's journey. He brought her to a modeling contest in 1998, when she was 15, and she won a contract with the Elite agency, which launched her career.

A dozen years later she was living in New York and working successfully in TV commercials but also studying at The Lee Strasberg Theatre & Film Institute to improve her acting skills. Within a year she got her first role in feature films, followed soon after by another. She never stopped making art, however, and took part in a group exhibit called *Art Meets Fashion* with contributions by 50 artists from around the world. "I thought, *This is something I want to keep on doing*," Chabanol remembers.

Following that impulse, she produced a solo art exhibit in 2015, *Born in Blue*. "It included a short animated film and was immersive," she says—before a Van Gogh show set that trend.

She continued her mix of art, acting, and modeling after a relationship brought her to Los Angeles, where she created art exhibits she called *Namsis* and *Black Namsis*—about reflection and meditation—and wrote and illustrated a children's book called *Blueboo*. "Then the pandemic happened," she says, "and I started to paint more seriously, exploring the color palette." She works primarily in acrylics but notes, "Art for me is about the subject more than the medium. *Namsis* was mixed media. *Blueboo* was a fluid story; watercolor talked to me."

A recollection collection (from top): ***Fusion***, ***Spirit***, and ***Where Shadows Weep***, like the other partly figurative equine paintings in Chabanol's new ***Reminiscence*** exhibit, draw on decades-old memories of a time when she was struggling with her emotions. The use of quick-drying acrylics pushes her to create in the moment. "I like things I don't have control over," she says.

Because acrylic dries so fast, it also forces Chabanol not to overthink what she's working on. "I like things I don't have control over," she says. "I want to create in the moment." She adds that, for her, the art is physical and emotional. "Painting with acrylics is like an athletic performance, and I try to immerse people in the storytelling," she says. "I want them to feel what I felt."

For the last few years Chabanol and her husband have been living in Santa Barbara, which she first visited with her mother during a modeling assignment. "This town was amazing," she remembers thinking. "It reminds me of where I grew up, and I thought I could feel at home here." She came often while living in Los Angeles, and since making the move, she says, "it's been an exploration. [Santa Barbara] is beautiful, communal, and I love how people can talk to each other."

Meanwhile, Chabanol's acting career hasn't stopped. She's still being called to auditions, and late last year she acted in an indie film that's being edited for a release this year.

But art is currently her emphasis. When she sent some of her work to the Tamsen Gallery, the pieces resonated with manager Lara Firestone, who offered a show. "The gallery gave me a green light," says Chabanol.

"We're delighted to feature Loan's *Reminiscence*," says Firestone, "which is Loan's journey through nostalgia, deep reflection, and personal memories. Her artwork evokes a sense of familiarity and warmth, inviting viewers to revisit cherished memories and connect with her artistic expression."

"I can't project my future," says Chabanol. "But [art] is what I should be doing. I feel like something is pushing me to do this. I have to be in touch with my intuition. I have to knock at the door." ♦

Reminiscence *is on view at the Tamsen Gallery (tamsengallery.com) through May 31.*