

Modern Interpretations of Impressionist Painting by San Diego Artists

California and the San Diego area has been a popular destination for artists for almost a hundred years. In 1910 many artists working on the East coast traveled here to paint and eventually moved here, also spreading the word and encouraging fellow artists to do the same. Artists from Europe journeyed here and also found inspiration in the wide open spaces and wilderness of early California. Things have changed a lot since then, the most beautiful places are the most inhabited now, Malibu, Pasadena, Laguna, and San Diego. But one thing that hasn't changed is the number of artists who are inspired by the beauty of this area and work in the traditional California Impressionist style. The California Art Club was formed in 1910 and is still in existence with over 200 members still working in the California Impressionist style. The style was an offshoot of French Impressionism, and is notable for a more realistic depiction of the native landscapes of early California - Eucalyptus trees, desert scenes, dramatic coastal scenes, all bathed in the unique light of California. Why is the light unique here? It's the climate, a combination of the dry inland air and foggy coast. The dry air allows for crisp colors, and views that can go on forever as opposed to climates back east with much more moisture in the air. The on-shore winds that blow in the fog from the ocean softens colors and the edges of shapes and the contrast between these two forces is worth committing to paint.

“I can't help but specialize in landscape painting”



Buckwheat at Torrey Pines by Joan J. Grine

Joan J. Grine (www.joangrine.com) is a local artist who works in oils and pastels in a style reminiscent of the California Impressionists. “I am an Impressionist only in the sense that I use very little detail. I try to get the feeling for the scene I am painting, not every leaf.” Some of Joan's inspirations are Alfred R. Mitchell, Maurice Braun, Charles A. Fries, William Wendt, and Guy Rose, who were all part of the early California Impressionist movement, part of which was based in Point Loma. “Their use of color and atmosphere of the landscape and the subject matter that are seen in their paintings are qualities that I try to capture in my work. Although my art is different from theirs, I am not as accomplished as they were. I am not there yet.”, says Joan with a charming laugh. But in looking at this award winning artists work, you will be impressed with her style and technique.

Much of Joan's work is done on location en plein air. “I prefer working outdoors, finishing a painting as far as I can, then relying on my photos to complete it in my studio. I also work from the start with a photo when teaching or doing a demonstration where I am not able to be outdoors. I sometimes use a watercolor wash on white pastel paper, and use pastels on top, or when using oils, I like to tone the canvas in the same way, using watercolor or acrylics. I don't like to work on a white surface.”

Joan studied with noted pastelist Albert Handel, who inspired her pastel painting the most. “He introduced me to sanded papers and other new textured surfaces. Plus his instruction gave me a fresh start in pastel painting, by

learning how to apply more pastel to the surface and encouraging me to use more color.”

When you look at Joan’s landscape paintings you can’t help but share her love of nature. “I hope my work inspires people to get out and enjoy the open spaces around them as I do. After many years of camping, bird watching and hiking I can’t help but specialize in landscape painting.”

Like many artists, Joan has been working at her craft since childhood. “I have studied art since I took children’s classes in pastel, majored in art in college, and have taken many classes and workshops since.” Joan keeps her skills fresh by regular attendance in a life drawing group. “Drawing from the model is so important, it enables



me to study the human form, either by doing quick sketches, or sometimes developing these sketches into paintings. I have discovered through the years that constantly sketching and painting is important to improve my skill. Everyone should keep at it.”

“plein air is a type of meditation for me”

Marianne Champlin (www.champlinart.com) also works in the California Impressionism style. This style is usually done outdoors, “en plein air” (in the open air), all in one session “alla prima”.

Bush Creek by Marianne Champlin Marianne notes as influences Kathryn Stats, Clyde Aspevig and John Twachman, and admires their use of color, values and loose style. As a contemporary artist her work is different from them because she employs the use of her own digital photos to capture the scene. She complements these with field studies, sometimes returning to the same location to finish the work if it is large, rather than finishing in one session.

When working outdoors Marianne describes her technique as this: “I like to work on masonite panels in the field as I can quickly get the information down in one or two hours. I use linen as my first choice for finished oil paintings. If I am using a field study or digital photo I prefer to work in the studio.”

Artists acquire styles, techniques and mentors along the path of life, some in their early years that they never forget. “My seventh grade to ninth grade art teacher had a big impact on me, he made me realize the value of doing a composition over. Also I had an excellent watercolor instructor at Casper College - Steve Nagel who is now deceased.” Marianne’s early instruction in art was based in California and had an emphasis on painting from life. She also had excellent instruction in Wyoming and numerous workshops since returning to her art work after raising three daughters, as well as a career in teaching. Painting can be a cathartic process too, observes Marianne, “working with my painting has helped me twice through widowhood.”

Painting plein air is a type of meditation for Marianne “it helps keep my true values in perspective. A painter shows you what he painted, I try to show the viewer why I painted the painting.”

In 1996 Marianne started the Rancho Santa Fe Art Guild. “I thought it was important to have a group of artists who could be a positive force in the arts, able to reach out and encourage the visual arts in San Diego County. In the years since it was founded we have volunteered our time in out reach programs and used the proceeds of our sales in the gallery and fund raisers to give some scholarship assistance to art students and fund other out reach programs. The group gives the members the opportunity to support each other, paint together and critique each others work.”



“I’m only concerned with the emotional aspect of a painting.”

Marileigh Schulte (www.marileighschulte.com) associates her style with Impressionism. She names as inspiration Richard Schmid, CW Mundy, Carolyn Anderson, and Quang Ho, because she admires their loose style. She studied under CW Mundy and was given the advice to “go home and paint 100 small paintings and then we’ll talk about your chances of hanging in the best galleries!” Marileigh has had the opportunity to watch some of the great painters living today work. “I used to put workshops together for groups of artists and have seen some of the top painters in the world paint and demonstrate their techniques, so that was a big benefit for me.”

Sadie Rose by Marileigh Schulte As a modern day Impressionist, Marileigh takes advantage of working from life as well as from her own photos. “I love to work from life but paint mainly from photos. I like to work bold and loose.”



When you look at Marileigh’s paintings you see something right away that grabs you. She believes the painting speaks for itself, “I don’t want to have to explain what I was trying to say as collectors don’t give a hoot about that. For the people who will live with my paintings I hope it touches their hearts and connects on an emotional level. The people who collect my work value my work and what I put into each piece. It’s important to me as an artist, that I don’t sell myself short and give paintings away . Never give a piece away as it will not hold much value to the recipient.”

As a member of the Rancho Santa Fe Art Guild, Marileigh notes, “I’ve made some of my best friends as a result of this group. Many of us paint together every week and it is always fun to share our knowledge and resources.”

“Atmosphere created through light, moody at times”

Child’s Play by Michael Michael Steirnagle, (www.Steirnagle.com) is a Neo Impressionist who uses lush color and amazing brush work to tell stories about people. There is a strong sense of mood that is created by the contrasts of light in these powerful atmospheric paintings.

Michael studied at the Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles. For the next twenty five years he became a professional illustrator and has taught at Palomar College since 1990.

Several artists Michael lists as influential are John Singer Sargent, Joaquin Sorolla, Edward Hopper, and Lucian Freud. Michael’s work is unique from these artists in the way he personalizes and modernizes his subjects. “I have learned a great deal from their approach to painting and their styles. I paint people I have known and places I have been and try to convey a sense of story telling in my work also. I work in oils and since much of my work is figurative, I must rely on my own photographs as a starting place. However, I do not copy photo-

graphs, I only use them for inspiration and technical assistance.”

Although Michael’s pictures are beautiful in their color and composition, he says he does not paint pretty pictures. “I paint pictures that (hopefully) awaken an emotion in the viewer. The only message my work carries is one that the viewer might attach to it.”

Part of the artistic process for Michael involves time spent in reflection. “Being an artist requires a great deal of time spent alone. I paint people to bridge the gap created by that time spent by myself. All of my paintings possess a certain degree of atmosphere created through light, composition and subject matter. They are moody at times. So am I.”

Michael is a member of the Rancho Santa Fe art guild. “As I don’t have another gallery in the San Diego area it allows me to exhibit my work and to make connections with people and artists who have similar interests.”

“Space and tranquility”

Devon Springer (devon@artbydevon.com) paints Impressionist landscapes with a contemporary slant. Inspired by the styles of Van Gogh and Mark English for their use of color, and the simplicity of shapes, Devon’s paintings communicate her love of space and the tranquility of pasture and trees. “It is important to me to paint scenes of Beauty which inspires someone to look at more than once.” She has studied with Sebastian Caprilli and Dan McCaw.



Shutters designed and painted by Mary Pierson

Devon’s style is to work out doors and then return to her studio to finish a piece. She often will work over an old painting, allowing the under painting to give texture.

“The Rancho Santa Fe Art Guild has been the main artistic source for selling my art and getting information regarding the art community.”

“Beautiful textures and scenes”

Mary Pierson is an Impressionistic Decorative Artist, who paints on many surfaces, including furniture, walls, niches, shutters and canvas. Her murals encompass themes from children’s characters to tone on tone wall treatments of vines, birds, and flowers.

Looking at Mary’s work you are reminded of something you might see traveling in Europe, beautiful textures and scenes from churches and museums. Mary lived in Europe for six years and developed a respect for the beauty and quality of antique furniture and art. “I am inspired by antique painted furniture and tapestries. I imitate the patina and use the decorative elements such as acanthus leaves, urns and birds often seen in antique furniture and wall frescoes.”

Mary is mainly self taught, but remembers a watercolor teacher, Marcel Mahier, in Brussels, Belgium who encouraged her to avoid perfection and to find a medium in which she could express her interests.

She uses a wide variety of techniques, including acrylic tinted glazes and sandpaper on paint to mimic the effects of time. “I use acrylic and stains on wood or canvas or paint directly on walls, it is a process I have developed over time.”

View the artwork these artists at the Rancho Santa Fe Art Guild Gallery located at: 6004 Paseo Delicias, Rancho Santa Fe, CA 92067 (858) 759-3545 www.ranchosantafeartguild.org

The member artists also display next door at the Wells Fargo Bank.