



Building on a Legacy

*A look at the
California Art Club*

By Steve Simmons

Members of the California Art Club are carrying on a legacy. They are descendants of the California Impressionist movement and are working to promote and expand their heritage.

The California Art Club (CAC) operates from a historic bungalow near the Western Justice Center in Pasadena and near the site of the club's founding. "To us this is sacred ground," says Executive Director Elaine Adams. The club's first meeting was held in 1909 in artist Franz Bischoff's studio in the Arroyo Seco.

Drawn to California's beauty and climate, the founding "plein air" (in the open air) artist members promoted the merits of traditional fine arts of painting, sculpture and drawing.

And the work continues today. "We celebrate traditional techniques, harmonies, color values, composition and realistic work of art. We celebrate the joy of painting," Adams says. The movement is characterized by landscapes, seascapes, portraits and still life. The member artists (there are more than 500 in various categories) "are not just replicating a scene, but recreating its atmospheric effect; there's atmosphere oozing out of the scene," Adams says.

Adams works with a staff of seven to carry out the club's mission to promote "contemporary traditional" art.

To serve both its members and the public, CAC "promotes art exhibits that foster understanding of traditional art heritage and California history."

These have included the "On Location in Malibu" show at the Frederick R. Wiseman Museum of Art at Pepperdine University and "Spiritual Spectrum: Paintings and Sculptures by the California Art Club" at Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles. "Artists could submit any work that spiritually moved them," Adams said.

"The pieces our members created are pieces that need to be seen," Adams says. And to appreciate them viewers have to do the "plein air dance." "You have to step forward to examine the brush work and step back to see the colors coalesce and the painting come alive, you have to move."

The local chapter has three permanent exhibition sites:

- An ongoing exhibition, "Celebrating the Golden State," at the club's gallery at the Old Mill in San Marino.

- An ongoing series of "Rising Young Star" solo exhibitions at Marston's Restaurant in Pasadena. Participants are under 30 and members of the club's Mentor Program "They work with an artist member and learn how to put an exhibition together," Adams says.

- Shows at Blinn House in Pasadena, the home of Pasadena Women's City Club, curated by committee.

Adams also works with museums such as the Huntington Library, the Norton Simon Museum and the Pacific Asia Museum to elevate awareness of traditional contemporary art.

The club also provides training by sponsoring the Master Artist Workshops. Well-known artists teach and demonstrate traditional fine art skills of painting, sculpture and drawing.

To reach children, the club hosted an event with leading paleontological artist William Stout who showed them how to draw a dinosaur. "Children want realistic art," Adams said. (Stout is also managing editor of the club's popular newsletter, which Adams edits).

The California Art Club has a rich history. "The club set the cultural make-up of Los Angeles. The club built the collection of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County," Adams says.

CAC artists held the Gold Medal Juried Exhibition from 1913 until 1942, when the Depression, World War II, shifting tastes and Modernism brought about a decline in membership and status. Also in 1942, Hollyhock House, which was a gift to the club by Aline Barnsdall, reverted back to the city of Los Angeles in a tenure agreement.

"There were no documents, the collections started to disappear. It was a sad time in the club's history," Adams said.

Left: The Edgar Payne Award for Best Landscape Painting, a new award in the Gold Medal Juried Exhibition was awarded to Richard Humphrey for his painting, *The Cliffs and Sea at Point Vicente*.

Gold Medal Show

California fine artists Peter Adams and Béla Bácsi received "Best of Show" honors at the California Art Club's 96th Annual Gold Medal Juried Exhibition at the Pasadena Museum of California Art.

Adams, a nationally known painter from Pasadena and Bácsi, a Hungarian-born sculptor from Santa Barbara, were selected for the honor by their peers.

Bácsi's winning sculpture, entitled *Octopus* is carved from marble (see page 26). Adams took the Gold Medal for his still-life painting of Asian objets d'art, *Prajnaparamit, perfection of Wisdom* (see page 27).

The club presented a new award this year — the Edgar Payne Award for Best Landscape Painting, in honor of the famed landscape artist who served as the ninth president of the historic organization. The award was presented to Richard Humphrey, for his painting, *The Cliffs and Sea at Point Vicente*.

Each year, the show features 300 never-before seen works of art, including plein air paintings, portraits, still life and sculpture. This year's show also featured a collection of nearly 100 original miniature paintings — each no larger than 9" by 12."

The 2007 Gold Medal Show ended May 20, but the 2008 show will open in late April at the Pasadena Museum of California Art.

A few professional artists remained and in 1993, Peter Adams (Elaine's husband) was asked to serve as president. He was an established artist, yet he knew few in his tradition, so he accepted the position.

"I said we can make a difference," Elaine Adams says. "We can fix it."

The Adams, along with fellow artists Dan Goozé, Steve Huston, Stephen Mirich, Daniel Pinkham, Tim Solliday and William Stout, recruited other top artists to bring prestige back to the club. They developed membership and jurying committees and adopted a board structure. Then came the mentor programs, workshops, lectures and now the Collectors' Circle. Collectors' Circle members pay \$1,000 a year and are invited to special programs. A gala kicked off the 95th annual Gold Medal Juried Exhibition and Collectors' Circle members were treated to a dinner at the Pasadena Museum of California Art, surrounded by the artworks and hosting an artist at each table.

"Artists shape history and so do collectors," said Peter Adams. "Like the Medicis and the Catholic church. A great way to get to this art is through collecting."

An upcoming Collector's Circle event is a luncheon and tour at the 7,500-square-foot studio of artist Alexey Steele.

