

Imagination At Work

A Visit With Peter Adams

By B. ERIC RHOADS



PETER ADAMS IN HIS STUDIO
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*T*HE LONG DRIVE LEADING UP TO THE LARGE ESTATE in Pasadena, California, brings the visitor to an artist's own private version of paradise. Lush gardens, stone terraced walls and 19th-century European and Asian sculptures are designed to create a memorable experience. Approaching the property, the visitor sees two massive Greene and Greene/arts and crafts-style pillars with an oriental influence. Topped with fort-like ramparts, they were constructed of brick from the 1906 San Francisco fire and local river rock. Driving through the gates places the visitor in a bygone era.

A building comes into view — a two-story Tudor. The ground floor houses the offices of the California Art Club and the American Legacy Fine Arts Private Gallery. On the second floor is Peter Adams' studio, transformed into another moment in art history in the style of the Third Empire and Classical Pompeii.

On the stairs and on the huge outdoor deck are mosaic Pompeian designs.

A 70-foot mosaic octopus designed by Adams greets visitors. Double doors guard Adams' 900-square-foot studio space. North-facing skylights flood the area with Southern California light. A multitude of color-corrected lights is ready for evening sessions and those rare gray days. The doors and the three large lunette windows are framed with custom-designed mahogany and gold-leafed, fluted pilasters topped with Ionic and Corinthian capitals and embellished with sculptures of Hercules and putti. The view from this inspiring studio space encompasses a magnificently terraced garden with exotic plants and waterfalls. An inspiration to Adams for many a painting, the garden also has become a popular place for outdoor painting workshops.

"This was Elaine's dream," says Adams, referring to his wife's grand plan for the studio. With the help of interior designer Janie Fain of J.F. Interiors, the Adamses have created a setting that inspires artists and collectors while providing practical solutions. "Everything is functional and designed to keep me organized," he says. For example, four sliding cork-covered panels provide a convenient place to pin unfinished pastel paintings. A large neo-classical mahogany table on wheels stores works in progress.

"Organization was a gift from Elaine," says Adams, who admits to disorganization prior to his wife's grand plan to find a place for everything. "It's one of the most important lessons I've learned as an artist. Being organized has improved my ability to focus on my artwork."

Adams, 53, the son of an entrepreneur father, came from a family of artists.



GRAND PILLARS MARK THE ENTRANCE TO PETER ADAMS' STUDIO
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His maternal grandfather, George Brackett Seitz, painted at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. He later moved to Hollywood to practice the new art of filmmaking, becoming a director of silent films. He was known for *The Perils of Pauline* and later the *Andy Hardy Series* with Mickey

Rooney. Adams' paternal aunt, Julie MacDonald, was a sculptor. Adams made his entry into art at the age of 18 with strong family encouragement to follow his muse.

Considered one of the best California impressionists and pastel artists in America, Adams is known for his incredible ability to capture the effects of light while working on location. Since the age of 27, Adams has made his living as an artist after seven years of study with mentor Theodore N. Lukits (1897-1992), the defining force in Adams' life as an artist.

"Mr. Lukits taught me to capture the feeling of light and an intriguing sense of design. It was invaluable. His method

of teaching was very much like that of the 19th-century French academies. For the first two years of study, I drew from plaster casts and worked in a full range of black and white values. Later, I painted still lifes under varying lighting effects. To make it more challenging, Mr. Lukits would often project different colored lights on a set-up that might include a complex variety of objects and textures, such as statuettes, mirrors, silks and brass. Sometimes the set-up would be covered by a gauze fabric to create a sense of haze or to soften an illusion. This type of training helped me to interpret outdoor light and atmosphere."



LIGHT OF ORNAVASSO, 1998
OIL ON BOARD, 30 x 30 IN.

**EASTERN LIGHT AFTER THE STORM**

1999
OIL ON BOARD
24 x 18 IN.



NEPTUNE'S FOUNTAIN AT SUNSET
HUNTINGTON GARDENS, SAN MARINO, CALIFORNIA

2004
OIL ON BOARD
16 x 20 IN.

RAISING THE BAR

Not only is Adams a prolific and top selling artist, he is a man on a mission. Adams and his business-savvy wife, Elaine, want to elevate the standards of fine art and art education. In 1993, he became president of the California Art Club, formed in 1909 and soon headed by William Wendt.

"There were 75 members when I joined," he says. "When we did our first mailing to the membership, many letters came back marked 'deceased.'"

The Adamses made it their passion to resuscitate the club, once the home of America's greatest plein-air painters. The California Art Club has since grown to more than 3,000 members, though they capped artist membership at 350 to maintain high quality.

Part of their mission has been the development of a school for artists. "Right now, we're offering about six workshops a year," says Adams, "but we plan to have a school that would follow academic disciplines and take up to 90 full-time students. The academy would include a museum art gallery, an art reference library, and both full- and part-time classes."

Passion best describes my visit with Peter and Elaine Adams. As unpaid administrators of the California Art Club, they have made heroic contributions of time and money. The end result, according to Adams: "stronger education

and stronger artists in competitions, thus raising the standards of everyone in the club."

In spite of his presidential duties, Adams finds time to execute beautiful works of art. "In the early years," he says, "I sometimes sold about 100 paintings a year. As I get older, I want to do less volume and take more time on higher-quality works. I'd rather do about 12 fabulous paintings than a lot of smaller works." Talking with Adams about his art, it is clear that each passing day offers new inspirations and challenges.

Adams' adventurous spirit has taken him to countries throughout the world. He claims to be the first American artist to travel unaccompanied throughout the People's Republic of China, where he painted for six months — inside temples and along limestone mountain peaks.

The notoriety from this trip opened doors for another trip. In 1987, Adams was the only American artist to travel and paint with the mujahedeen rebels in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan.

"I love painting different cultures and environments that you don't see every day," says Adams. "Yet a lot of my works come right out of my imagination." After seeing the Los Angeles Opera Company's production of *Samson and Delilah* by Saint-Saens, he was inspired to paint a scene that



THE GREAT SACRIFICE TO DAGON; SAMSON AND DELILAH; JUDGES 16:23
2002, OIL ON BOARD, 30 x 40 IN.

would reflect the mystery and drama of the pagan ritual as described in Judges 16:23. Adams recently completed *The Great Sacrifice to Dagon: Samson and Delilah*, which shows Delilah as the high priestess surrounded by towering statues, columns and priests, with Samson barely visible in the dark foreground. In an effort he makes for his major works, Adams then designed a frame for the piece and had it carved by framemakers Carleton-Kirkegaard in Santa Barbara.

“For me, the best hours of painting *en plein air* come at the beginning or at the end of the day,” says Adams. “I am particularly interested in unique lighting effects and how these effects reflect,

refract, diffuse and obscure detail. The ethereal quality of light and atmosphere intrigue me. In painting natural or inanimate objects, I am constantly trying to discover and interpret interesting designs, shapes and color harmonies to stimulate the eye. Elevating the human spirit and arousing a sense of discovery excite me as an artist.” ■



ELAINE AND PETER ADAMS
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ARTIST DATA

<i>Name:</i>	Peter Adams	Hiroshi Yoshida (1876-1950) and Robert Talbot-Kelly (1861-1934)
<i>Birthdate:</i>	August 27, 1950	
<i>Birthplace:</i>	Los Angeles, CA	<i>Values:</i> \$2,700 – \$35,000
<i>Home:</i>	Pasadena, CA	<i>Galleries:</i> American Legacy Fine Arts, Pasadena, CA; Skidmore Contemporary Art, Malibu, CA; Tirage Fine Art, Pasadena, CA
<i>Influences:</i>	Theodore N. Lukits (1897-1992), Alphonse Mucha (1860-1939), Domenico Morelli (1826-1901), Etienne Dinet (1861-1929),	<i>Website:</i> www.americanlegacyfinearts.com