

Poetry Outdoors:

THE PAINTINGS OF DANIEL W. PINKHAM

This California painter elicits a spirit of calm from the landscape by maintaining a flexible technique—and following the lead of the subject matter.

—
by **John A. Parks**

Daniel W. Pinkham is a plein air painter who responds to the spirit of a place by varying his technique and approach. The results are paintings of great sensitivity and authority that seem to convey the very essence of each subject. The sheer seductiveness of his touch can be seen in a painting such as *Bearing Good Fruit in the Face of Adversity*, where a brilliant flat light falls on a field of snow behind which stands a red barn. Two fruit trees emerge from the snow, alive with movement in spite of their bare branches. Slender strokes of browns and blues quickly and surely delineate their form, while broad and generous helpings of paint heap the snow on the canvas. The barn is achieved in a flurry of vertical brushstrokes, while more delicate touches patch in the blue sky. In fact, the entire scene has been reinvented in a play of widely varied brushing and handling. This layering of active and open brushstrokes also allows the artist to secure subtle color changes within areas of the painting without sacrificing the liveliness of his attack and the delicious feel of fresh paint.

Pinkham regards the whole process of making the painting as one in which he opens himself up to a particular scene. "I don't always begin by painting," he says. "The first thing I do is sit and write a little about the place, thinking about why I stopped there, what it is exactly that interests me, how I feel about it, and what I want to expose with it. Only then do I begin sketching." He starts with a graphite drawing, laying out the elements of the composition—or he may just start sketching with wash on his canvas. "I don't have an inflexible approach as to how I go about it," says the artist. "I vary what I do depending on what the place is suggesting to me. Sometimes I might just start painting, piling on the color, and establishing everything very quickly. Other times I'll start slowly, building up a wash underpainting

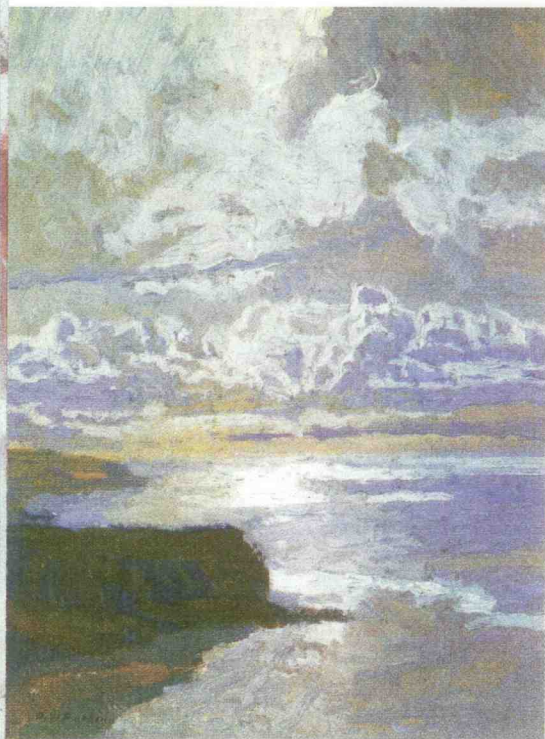
before beginning to work the color." By allowing the subject to dictate the technique, Pinkham manages to produce work that varies in weight, density, and palette. He challenges himself to be alive to

**Bearing Good
Fruit in the Face
of Adversity**

1990, oil on board,
14 x 11. All artwork
this article private
collection unless
otherwise indicated.



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ABOVE
A Moment to Shine
2002, oil on board,
48 x 40.

RIGHT
Looking Within
1995, oil on board,
16 x 16.

the subject by taking away any reliance on a repetitive and preconceived method. "I also think about surface texture," says Pinkham, "even before I begin painting. Some places just seem to demand a thicker, heavier surface, while others seem to call for quieter handling. Surface is another part of the painter's voice. The touch of the artist—his brushing, handling, and paint building—can convey an awful lot about his state of mind; it provides a kind of intimacy with the artist that you just can't get any other way."

Although a great deal of Pinkham's work is done on the spot, he also works up some of his images to larger paintings back in the studio. Here again he is

flexible in his approach, generally beginning with a broad sketch of the composition. "I would never square up a drawing mechanically," he says. "It's important that the larger work has the same sense of organic response that the small pieces do. Sometimes I'll sit for a while and imagine the entire painting being done before I even put a brush on the canvas. I go through everything in my head, the whole process of making the picture, start to finish, so that I have it all visualized. Then I start."

Pinkham's work also demonstrates some variation in finish. "You know you have finished when the painting is making the statement you wanted it to make," he says. Sometimes this happens quickly, and other times it has to be worked over for a longer period. Again, Pinkham is concerned with allowing the painting to dictate its own needs rather than imposing a uniform degree of finish on all his pictures. He is very thoughtful about the actual accomplishment of each painting. "I hope that the paintings suggest a certain state of mind," he says. "Often they have to do with rest, peace, and a quietness of spirit. The landscapes themselves become a springboard to induce this sense. This is something I have experienced out in the field, and my work is my way of bringing it back and giving it to others."

Although his paintings present an exquisite sensitivity to the world, Pinkham's process is both professional and extremely well organized. He paints on canvas glued to luan board that he prepares at home. He is also equipped with a good Russian easel, along with an umbrella, a stool, and foul-weather gear. Years ago he converted a U-Haul truck into a traveling studio, complete with a shower stall, so that he and his wife, Vicky, also an artist, could make months-long trips

