

Importance of Legacy in Artistic Practice

Daniel Pinkham revealed how an artist's education both positions the artist in a historical context and informs future practice.

BY MICHAEL GORMLEY

DANIEL PINKHAM

Daniel Pinkham is a poet of the outdoors whose works often have to do with rest, peace, and quietness of spirit. Pinkham has been a principal force in the resurgence of plein air painting in California and throughout the country. He

Rapid-Fire Questions

American Artist: Are you a Florentine or a Venetian?

Camille Przewodek: Venetian—they were about color.

AA: Was Rembrandt a colorist?

CP: I would consider him a master of light and shadow but not a colorist.

AA: You can meet with one dead artist. Who do you choose?

CP: Mary Orwig Everett.

AA: What's the first question you ask her?

CP: What was it like to study with Hawthorne?

AA: What do you imagine is the answer?

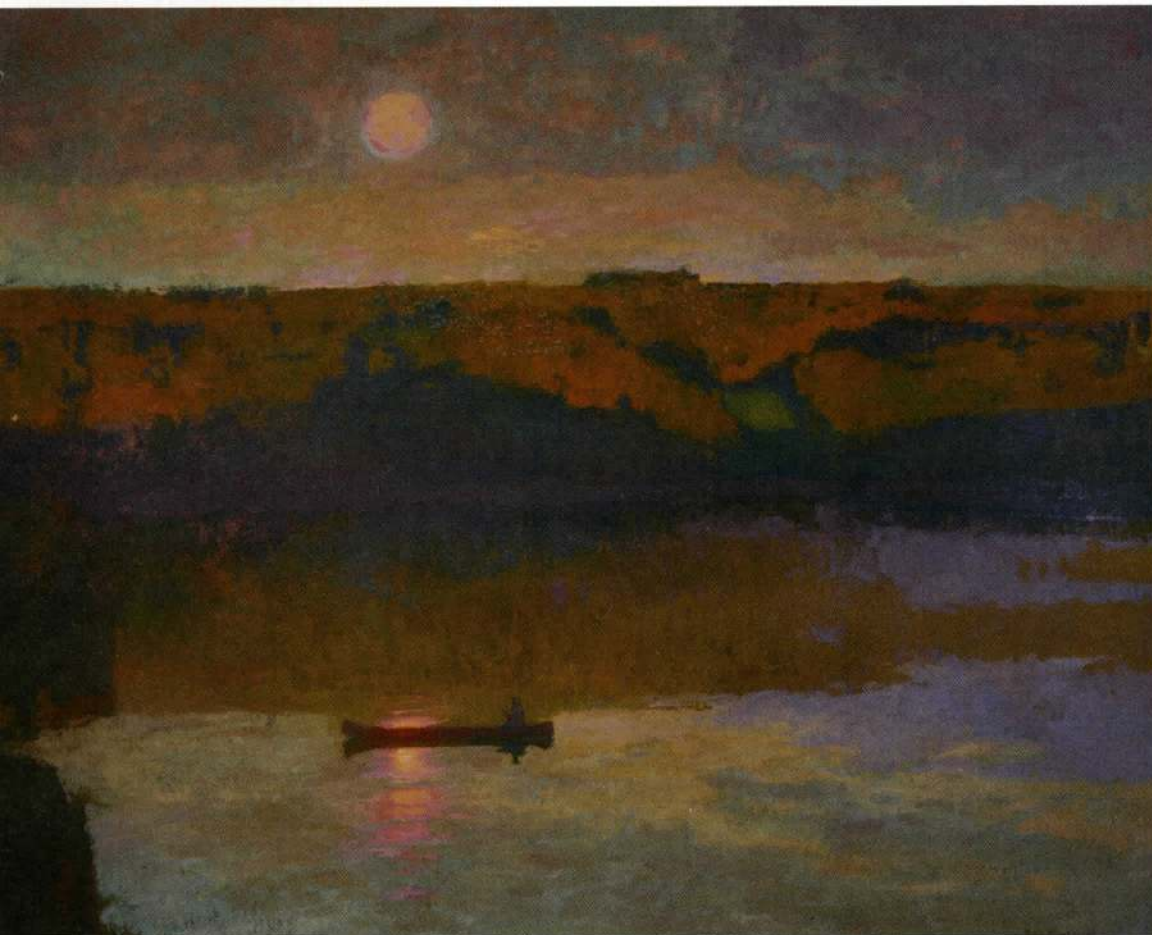
CP: "I was in the presence of greatness—I was witnessing the making of art history."

AA: What is the one thing an artist should do every day (besides bathe)?

CP: Be thankful that you don't have a 9-to-5 job. How many people make money doing a job that they are passionate about?

AA: What is the one thing you do every day that reminds you that you are an artist?

CP: Wash paint out of all of my good clothes.



LEFT

Sublime Order

by Daniel Pinkham, 2005,
oil, 40 x 48. Private
collection.

attended Art Center College of Design, in Pasadena, California, after which he received a full scholarship to apprentice for five years with Russian-born artist and renowned teacher Sergei Bongart (1918–1985). Pinkham later opened his own art school, which he operated from 1980 to 1985, and he has co-founded or been associated with art institutions such as the Plein Air Artists of California, Plein-Air Painters of America, and the Portuguese Bend Artist Colony.

American Artist: I was truly moved by the works of Sergei Bongart, whom you cite as your most important mentor. While I was researching his work I came across another one of his students, Ovanes Berberian, who also impressed me with his ability to express form with color. Like the Impressionists, who understood the expressive power of color, Bongart and Berberian capture a vivid sense of reality using a high-key palette similar to that employed by the Impressionists. Can you elaborate on the Impressionist sensibility?

Daniel Pinkham: We experience our external world fully engaged through color. Anything less on the canvas diminishes an emotional range for viewer experience. Sergei Bongart, my teacher, felt that Impressionism was the closest form of reality in painting. Through the impressionistic palette, the vibration and pulse of the moment becomes alive with emotion for the viewer. During the shared moment between the painting and viewer, the feeling or emotion exists in the present time of now. The emotional connection becomes reality for the viewer now and thus frees the artist's experience from the past.

Rapid-Fire Questions

American Artist: How many greens are on your plein air palette?

Daniel Pinkham: Two.

AA: What are they?

DP: Phthalocyanine green and chromium oxide green.

AA: If you could have only four tubes of paint, what would they be?

DP: Cadmium yellow, cadmium red light, ultramarine blue deep, and titanium white.

AA: What great master do you wish had written a book on his techniques and philosophy?

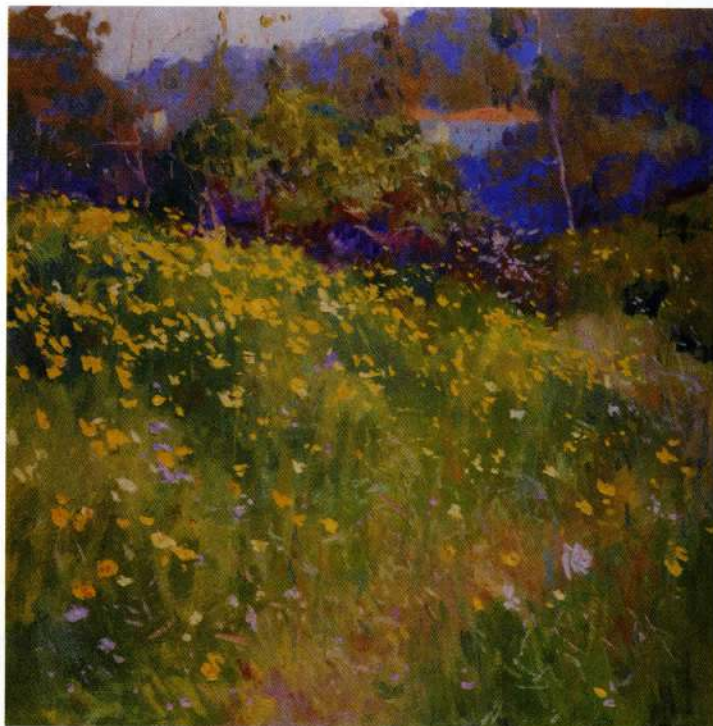
DP: Emil Carlsen.

AA: What would the title have been?

DP: Painting Beyond the Visible.

AA: Yes or No: Artists are born, not made.

DP: Yes, artists are born, but it takes a lot of work to learn the craft. Painters are made—they have to work hard as well, but after all the years of studying and learning the craft, the artist, the true artist, has something more to say than the others. Time discloses the artist's poetic vision.



ABOVE

Spring

by Daniel Pinkham, 1986, oil, 14 x 14. Collection the artist.

OPPOSITE PAGE

The Other Side

by Daniel Pinkham, 1990, oil, 11 x 14. Private collection.

AA: Can art offer us an experience that cannot be felt or experienced elsewhere?

DP: No other form of communication will ever be more penetrating and honest than painting. Painting is the deepest and most sacred gift of communication of the conscious and unconscious thoughts and feelings of the artist, deposited at the end of the brush. Without the artist even being aware of it, he is expressing intimate details of the subject and of himself through thousands of choices (such as brushwork, energy, color, development, and vision, to name a few) that are preserved on canvas to be shared at any given moment. A painting says what words cannot.

AA: What are the aims of your painting?

DP: The aims of my paintings are the same as of my life: to create a visible line of emotion that exposes my divine nature and reinforces the existence of that relationship.

AA: Of what significance is painting to the overall culture?

DP: At the tip of an artist's contemplated brush exists a line of communication that a distracted culture can overlook. With education and more exposure, an artist's impact can grow immeasurably within a short period of time. I believe we are entering a



new time for great painting. Our culture and society is hungry for a sincere, honest, and soulful exchange through man's best efforts. Painting is the perfect medium for this exchange.

AA: You are associated with establishing plein air associations, and it seems that you and your colleagues enjoy painting in a pack. How is this practice different from working in isolation? If you do sometimes work alone, which do you prefer? What happens to your painting process and the painting process of your colleagues when painting in a group?

DP: Artists are communicators first. I've always enjoyed both bringing people together and being in complete isolation. I feel comfortable in both circumstances. I really enjoy being the director of the Mentor Program for the California Art Club. Through great painting friends, ones who have earned one another's trust, we enjoy honest, insightful discussions and the exchange of ideas to help and support us in our work and life. For me, and I'm sure for most artists, being an artist is not just a career but also a lifestyle. We all need

time alone in the studio to distill and contemplate our efforts and thoughts. Finding the balance is mandatory. Most of my circle of friends are artists, and we continue to be heading in a similar direction.

AA: There has been a significant rise in plein air painting over the last decade. What do you attribute this popularity to? Is there any connection to the green movement? If not, should there be?

DP: Some of the groups I've helped form came together to concentrate their efforts for environmental and preservation causes. Our Portuguese Bend Artist Colony consists of seven childhood friends that grew up together as artists and have, through exhibitions, contributed toward buying and saving open space along both the California and Maine coasts. Plein air painting requires being close to your source of inspiration. It's a natural response to have your soul fed by nature and then, in return, find a way to give back through preservation. ■

Michael Gormley is the editorial director of American Artist.