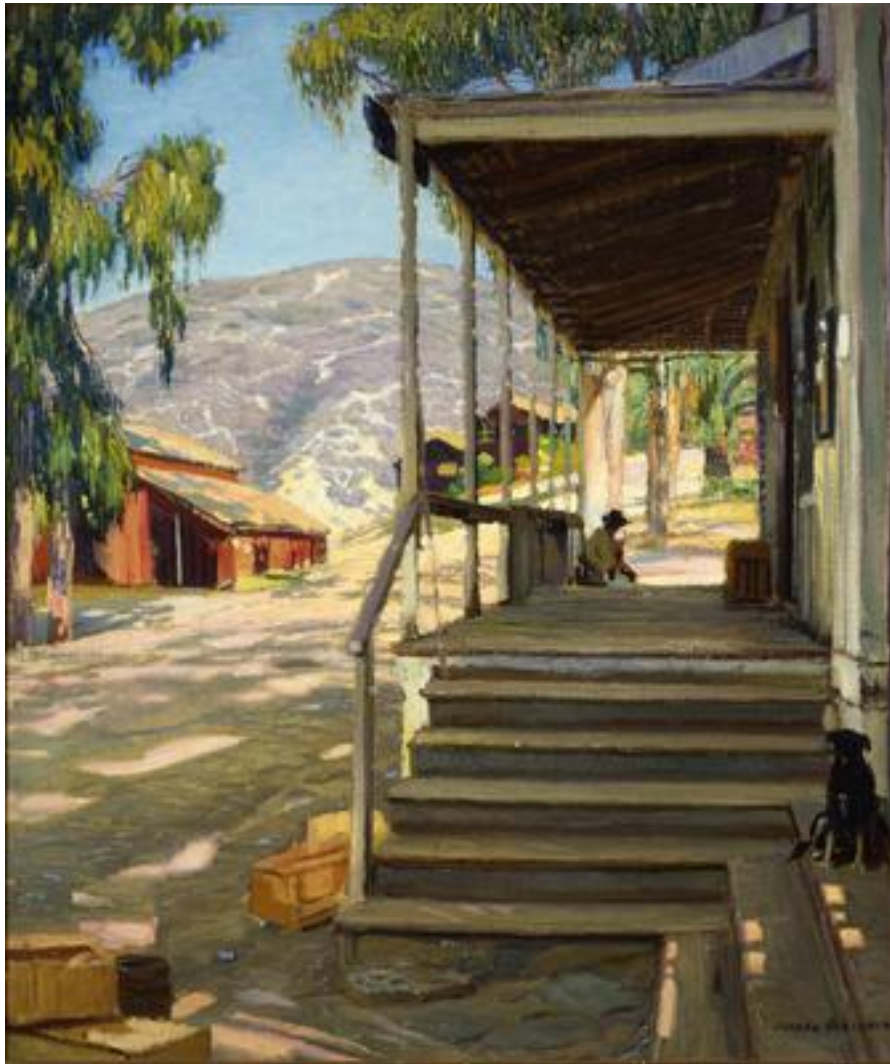


California Impressionism



Joseph Kleitsch, *The Old Post Office*, Laguna Art Museum

California Impressionism, also called Plein Air painting, originated in Southern California in the early 20th century in Laguna Beach, Pasadena and other scenic SoCal locations. Landscapes, seascapes and portraits by Franz A. Bischoff, George Brandriff, Alson S. Clark, Paul de Longpré, William A. Griffith, Anna Hills, Granville Redmond, Guy Rose, Donna Schuster, William Wendt and others are reminiscent of works by French painters Corot, Monet and Renoir.

Many California Impressionist painters used the light, broad brush strokes and pure, bright colors of their earlier French counterparts. Yet the California version concentrated on the magic Southland light to depict bucolic landscapes.

Several artists, including Jean Mannheim, came to the United States from

Europe as Impressionism there gave way to post-impressionism, cubism and other modern movements. In the early 20th Century, as East Coast and European artists were exhibiting these more avant-garde styles, California remained an outpost of the earlier, more scenic style of painting.

History

California painters, Joseph Kleitsch, Edgar Payne, Frank Cuprien and several others are today giants of California Impressionism, their works costing several hundreds of thousands of dollars each. But back in the early 20th century, they were struggling artists several living in the sleepy town of Laguna Beach.

In 1910, Laguna Beach had about 300 residents, many of them, artists, writers and musicians. The few buildings in town included a general store/post office. Joseph Yoch's Laguna Beach Hotel and board and batten cottages. In 1918, the local artists were given a one-room building for a gallery that was nestled in a eucalyptus grove. It had been used as a Sunday school and town meeting hall.

In later years, Cuprien discussed the remodeling of that building. "In the summer of 1918, we fixed up the ramshackle old building with the assistance of Nick Isch. First we drove the bats out of the building and built a skylight in the roof. We whitewashed the walls and oiled the old floors. Later on we had a sewing bee, with all the ladies of the town present, and covered the walls with burlap. Everybody worked like Trojans."

Art Association

The Laguna Beach Art Association was formed on August 20, 1918. Artists agreed to monthly exhibitions of paintings no larger than 28 x 36 inches. The association was incorporated in 1920, oriented toward the visual arts, music and drama.

William Griffith spoke about the early days on the radio in 1932. "Those were happy days. The art gallery was the center of all social activities, and numerous were the parties, lectures and contests held there. We needed a piano, so Max Wiczorek gave a painting for which Louis Danz traded a piano. At that time there were no sidewalks or graded streets in our village and at the nightly gatherings everyone came carrying a lantern. There was a spirit of fellowship in the whole community, and when William Wendt (after whom a street in Laguna is named) returned from a year in Europe the whole village turned out to welcome him home."

Circles of Influence

In 2000, the Orange County Museum of Art in Newport Beach opened its exhibition. "Circles of Influence." Subtitled, "Impressionism to Modernism in

Southern California Art, 1910 to 1930,” the show featured 71 paintings. This exhibition depicted the history of how artists from the East Coast and Chicago and those trained in Europe influenced California artists — natives and emigres. It explored how Southern California artists were inspired by national and international art styles of the time, and how they created their own unique art movement.

The exhibition included landscapes, along with paintings of woman at leisure, children at play, home interiors and still-lives. Curator Sarah Vure wrote in the exhibit catalog, “These artistic and organizational efforts of Southern California painters in the first three decades of the twentieth century were significant accomplishments that contributed to the aesthetic and intellectual life of the city...this astonishing array of brilliantly colored and dramatically expressive paintings is a testament to the diversity of influences and creative energy of Southern California’s early twentieth-century artistic circles.”