

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.

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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.

