

MEMOIRS OF THE CALIFORNIA ART CLUB 1993–2006

by Peter Adams, President

WHEN I WAS ASKED TO BECOME THE PRESIDENT OF THE California Art Club in 1992 I had no way of knowing that I would serve in that position for at least thirteen years, and that the Club would grow in membership and prestige to become one of the foremost organizations of its type in the country.

I was somewhat hesitant to join the California Art Club as a member, and very reluctant to serve as president. As a *Contemporary-Traditional* fine artist, I had always felt discriminated, isolated, and even alienated from the art world. All my artist friends—every one of them—had complained of this same feeling of alienation. They believed they could never be accepted by the art establishment, because the contemporary artists they most revered were not accepted; and indeed the historic artists of the late-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century, whom they most admired, were not even mentioned in art history classes or at art schools! I'm speaking of European artists, such as Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, William Adolphe Bougureau, Sir Frank Brangwyn, Jean-Léon Gérôme, Alfred Gilbert, Lord Frederic Leighton, Alphonse Mucha, Ilya Repin, Joaquin Sorolla and Anders Zorn, to name just a few. In America, the east coast Impressionist painters, the California *plein air* landscape painters, as well as many great American sculptors, such as Daniel Chester French,

Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Anna Hyatt Huntington and Paul Manship, were also neglected in art history classes.

Initially, when I was offered the position of president of the California Art Club, I rejected the offer until my wife, Elaine, challenged me by saying, "All you do is complain about the art world. Why don't you try to do something about it? Besides, you won't have to do anything—I'll do all the work!" So, I was persuaded.

Elaine and I called a meeting in our living room with a few respected artists and friends: Dan Goozéé, Steve Huston, Stephen E. Mirich, Tim Solliday and William Stout; and discussed the idea of asking our artist friends to join the beleaguered California Art Club, which had dwindled to approximately eighty members, most of whom were hobby artists. The idea was to restore the Club to its glory days of the teens, twenties and thirties.

The first thing we decided to change was the concept of the monthly luncheon meetings for our general membership. We also relocated to a larger restaurant that could accommodate more people. For the most part, we rejected the common art club practice of having an artist demonstrate how to paint in an hour and a half. Instead, we engaged the new wave of art historians to lecture on a period of art history that we felt was most neglected in our school system, and yet most pertinent to us as artists. We are greatly indebted to many renowned historians for the thought-provoking lectures they presented to our membership; they include: Gerald Ackermann, Ph.D.; Albert Boime, Ph.D.; Ilene Susan Fort, Ph.D.; William H. Gerdts, Ph.D.; Nancy Dustin Wall Moure; Deborah Epstein Solon, Ph.D.; Jean Stern; Vern Swanson, Ph.D.;



TOP TO BOTTOM:
Sculptors Béla Bácsi and Christopher Slatoff lead a general membership meeting and tour of the Norton Simon Museum's sculpture collection. Pasadena, 2006
Alexey Steele paints living history models of Father Junipero Serra and a Juaneño maiden. Mission San Juan Capistrano, 1996



Patricia Trenton, Ph.D.; and Michael Zakian, Ph.D. Soon, our monthly meeting attendance grew from fifteen to more than 150 and included collectors, museum scholars, art dealers, and a host of art aficionados, besides just the artists. To accommodate our growing membership, we found it necessary to relocate to a larger and more professional lecture facility, and thanks to the hospitality of the Autry National Center, the California Art Club was provided with the use of their world-class auditorium, the Wells Fargo Theater, where we continue to meet to this day.

The next significant change we implemented, almost simultaneously with restructuring the format of the luncheon meetings, was to transform the two-page publication, *California Art Club Bulletin*, into the *California Art Club Newsletter*. The *Newsletter* is our best ambassador; it spreads our philosophy, helps interest a wider audience and recruits new members. It has become a thirty-two-page mini-magazine with my wife, Elaine, as editor-in-chief. The *Newsletter* contains scholarly articles by such prestigious authors as Bruce W. Chambers, Ph.D.; Jane Dini, Ph.D.; J. David Farmer, Ph.D.; Amy Scott; Jean Stern; and Tom Wolfe, as well as articles written about contemporary artists by Molly Siple. The *Newsletter* deals with local and international subjects pertaining to both historic and contemporary-traditional fine art. Furthermore, it profiles living artists and lists gallery and museum exhibitions and lectures, membership news, and the myriad of activities the California Art Club organizes.

THERE HAVE BEEN SO MANY WONDERFUL EVENTS THE CLUB HAS ORGANIZED during the past thirteen years, all of which have been fun, educational and exciting. I smile as I recall a few key events, because they bring back such fond memories. Besides the numerous workshops, monthly meetings, annual *Gold Medal Exhibitions*, quarterly paint-outs with our regional chapters in San Diego, Santa Barbara and the San Francisco Bay Area, we have organized many bus trips to museum and gallery exhibitions in Santa Barbara, Palm Springs, Laguna Beach, Oxnard, Orange County and San Diego. The bus trips themselves are always a lot of fun because of our art trivia quizzes and because my mother-in-law, Emma Shelby, always brings her accordion and sings and leads us in songs. Inevitably, the bus driver, who is usually singing along, has to plead with some of our more unruly members to “sit down and stop dancing in the aisle.”

Thanks to the generosity of Joan Irvine Smith, we have had many unforgettable years painting and exhibiting at the historic Mission San Juan Capistrano. These special events provided artists with the opportunity to hone their craft by working alongside one another, and through the process, great friendships were nurtured. This spirit of camaraderie and learning was equally true at similar painting events held in Santa Ana at the Bowers Museum and at the Autry National Center.



Artists at Mission San Juan Capistrano paint-out: Mian Situ, Samuel Michlap, Gerald Rahm, Aaron St. John, Jean Legassick, Gregory Hull, and Jeffrey C. Horn. 1999

BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT:

Group paint-out with live models.

Private southern California beach cottage, 2000

Dining together after a full day of painting: Rick Rand, Robin Hall, Cathey Cadieux, Aaron St. John, Cathy Springs, Rosalind Gallup, David C. Gallup, Elaine Adams and Alexey Steele. 2000





Two other paint-outs and culminating exhibitions come to mind: the *Chinatown Art Festival* exhibition of 2001 and the *Spiritual Spectrum* exhibition held in 2004 at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles. Both of these successful exhibitions were developed by Gayle Garner Roski, a California Art Club Artist member and dedicated member of our Board of Directors. These two downtown Los Angeles venues displayed very different aspects of our artists' sensibilities. In the *Chinatown* event our artists immersed themselves in the Chinese culture. The quaintness of the antique stores, the magic of the Chinese Art Deco architecture, and the excitement and pageantry of our opening ceremony, with a festive Ming and Ching Dynasty parade, were exhilarating and clearly reflected in the artwork. The exhibition, *Spiritual Spectrum*, however, was just as auspicious but in a different way. The artwork displayed at the Cathedral was more serene and spoke of a spiritual depth of each of the artists' inner nature.

SINCE 1999 THE CLUB HAS HELD QUARTERLY exhibitions in the California Art Club Gallery at The Old Mill in San Marino. This romantic historic venue, built in 1816 as a grist mill for Mission San Gabriel, has been an ideal gallery to showcase artwork by some of our finest artists. To date, we have produced more than twenty memorable exhibitions under the auspices of The Old Mill Foundation. In addition, since 2001, the

TOP TO BOTTOM:

Artists networking and sharing art philosophies: Frank M. Serrano, Glenn Dean, Calvin Liang, Eric Merrell, Gwen Dean and Logan Hagege. Mission San Juan Capistrano, 2002

Opening ceremony for the Chinatown Art Festival exhibition, where five members of the Ming Dynasty Emperor's Court are joined by architect Roger Hong, Peter Adams and Gayle Garner Roski. Chinatown, Los Angeles, 2001

Educational outreach "art salon" program with panelists: John Cosby, Daniel W. Pinkham, Peter Adams, Elaine Adams, Steve Huston and Andrea Favilli. Private club, Los Angeles, 1999

Blinn House, the 1905 George Maher Craftsman-styled home that now serves as the Women's City Club of Pasadena, has provided us with an inviting setting where we can highlight artwork created by our Painting Patron Members on a biannual basis.

We have also helped curate many fascinating and unique exhibits in the last few years and have had the pleasure to work with such wonderful museums and institutions as: Academy of Art University in San Francisco, Bowers Museum of Cultural Art, Carnegie Art Museum, Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles, Frederick R. Weisman Museum of Art, The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, Pacific Asia Museum, Pasadena Museum of California Art, Pasadena Museum of History, Phippen Museum, Riverside Art Museum, and Springville Museum of Art.

We have created numerous workshops over the years, most of which have been *plein air* painting classes with celebrated landscape painters. We have also produced a few figure and head painting classes, as well as sculpture workshops. In addition to the workshop classes, the California Art Club has created the Mentor Program for young artists ages thirty and under. One of the benefits of

being a Mentor Program Member is that they have the opportunity to assist in our workshops and receive free instruction and guidance from our established Signature Members. Daniel W. Pinkham has been an inspirational leader presiding over this program. Frequently, the hills of Palos Verdes can be seen dotted with Mentor Program Members painting





and taking their lead from Dan. We are also extremely pleased that since September of 2005 Marston's Restaurant of Pasadena has been showcasing these young artists and exhibiting their works on a bimonthly basis under the title "Rising Young Stars."

In the last three years we have restructured our Board of Directors from a board of all artists to that of a combination of artists, business people and community leaders. Our new Board has projected new life and new ideas into our organization. Perhaps one of the most exciting ideas has been the implementation of our Collectors' Circle Program. Members of the Collectors' Circle pay higher annual dues and enjoy many special events catered just for them. We hold dinners and lectures at various exclusive locations, including art patrons' homes, private clubs, artist studios, sculpture foundries, and museums. Currently, with more than fifty couples, the Collectors' Circle has become an integral part of the California Art Club.

OUR SUCCESS WITH ALL OUR MANY AND VARIED ACTIVITIES PROVES THAT contemporary-traditional art is certainly becoming part of the mainstream of American art. Yet, it is California and the California Art Club that are particularly fortunate for three reasons. First, we have a unique heritage of the early *plein air* painters. Many of us follow in their footsteps and our works are bathed in sunlight and spontaneity. The second reason for our good fortune is our Hollywood connection. Just as in the music profession, the world's top painters and sculptors come to southern California to work for the movie and television industry. These artists typically work in special effects, animation, and storyboard illustration. They bring with them an understanding of the latest technical skills and an innovative sense of imagination. And the third reason is the influx of academically trained artists from China. In recent years, many of these exquisitely schooled artists have come to the United States and settled in California in search of a market for their work. We are fortunate to have a majority of these top Chinese artists in our organization. With the synthesis of the *plein air* painters, the artists from the film industry, and the Chinese academicians, it is exciting to realize that the standard and quality of art will continue to rise. Moreover, the vast diversity of these three groups and the synergy of these artists working together produce our greatest strength. Their work helps to define society today and lays a bedrock foundation for future generations of artists. It is indeed an exciting time to be alive as a traditional fine artist.

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT:

Workshop with master artist Jove Wang. The Huntington Botanical Gardens, San Marino, 2001

Members of the Collectors' Circle learn about bronze casting and mold making from sculptor Peter Brooke. American Fine Arts Foundry, Burbank, 2006

One of the Collectors' Circle unique educational programs, "A Day with Master Sculptors," included a tour of the American Fine Arts Foundry where members experienced the pouring of liquid bronze into molds. Burbank, 2006

Mentor Program Members Eric Merrell and Ernesto Nemesio absorb painting techniques from Mentor Program Chairman Daniel W. Pinkham. San Diego, 2000

