

*The Other Side*, oil, 12" by 16"

*"I struggled to keep this fresh and simple. It was intended to expose a guiding spirit. If I visually stayed with the roses too long, I would never move beyond the gate."*

## THE POWER OF COLOR

*By Barbara Coyner*

"Pick out five pieces from this show and I'll tell you what the artist was thinking at the time he painted them."

Dan Pinkham's challenge to a friend at a Maynard Dixon showing in California might have sounded boastful, but it wasn't, he says, continuing his story. "He picked five pieces and, as we stood in front of one of them, I told him I saw evidence of separation and divorce at that point in the artist's life. It should've been a happy piece, but there was a numbness of emotion."

As he shared his thoughts on the painting of a Southwest adobe setting, Pinkham noticed a museum docent listening intently. When the impromptu analysis concluded, Pinkham walked over to another Dixon piece, this one imposing and striking, and commented that it was one of the artist's finest works, then commented on several others.

The docent finally spoke. "You told my life in those five paintings," he said, adding that he was Dixon's son. He painfully recalled that the Southwest painting was one done

around the time of his parents' divorce, while the other that Pinkham had described as one of Dixon's best had been his father's favorite. Pinkham was astounded.

"The language of color, shapes, texture and composition were actually the blueprints of where the artist was at the time," he says. Pinkham applies the same approach to his own paintings, intending to convey a mood, not a story. The Palos Verdes, California, artist focuses on landscapes and paints entirely en plein air, finding both his





*Voice of Many Waters, oil, 36" by 36"*

*"I can't, with words, explain the effect that a gentle falling snow has on me. I do know this—for me, it is like a visual prayer."*

inspiration and his mood best presented in the ever-changing outdoor studio. "Landscapes are for me the vehicle that seems closer to the heart," he says, adding that he seldom adds figures because they steal from the Creator's handiwork. As for his own handiwork, color is the mainspring.

"The power of a color is its relationship to the other colors next to it," he says. "It has greater strength than by itself. It's one thing to have

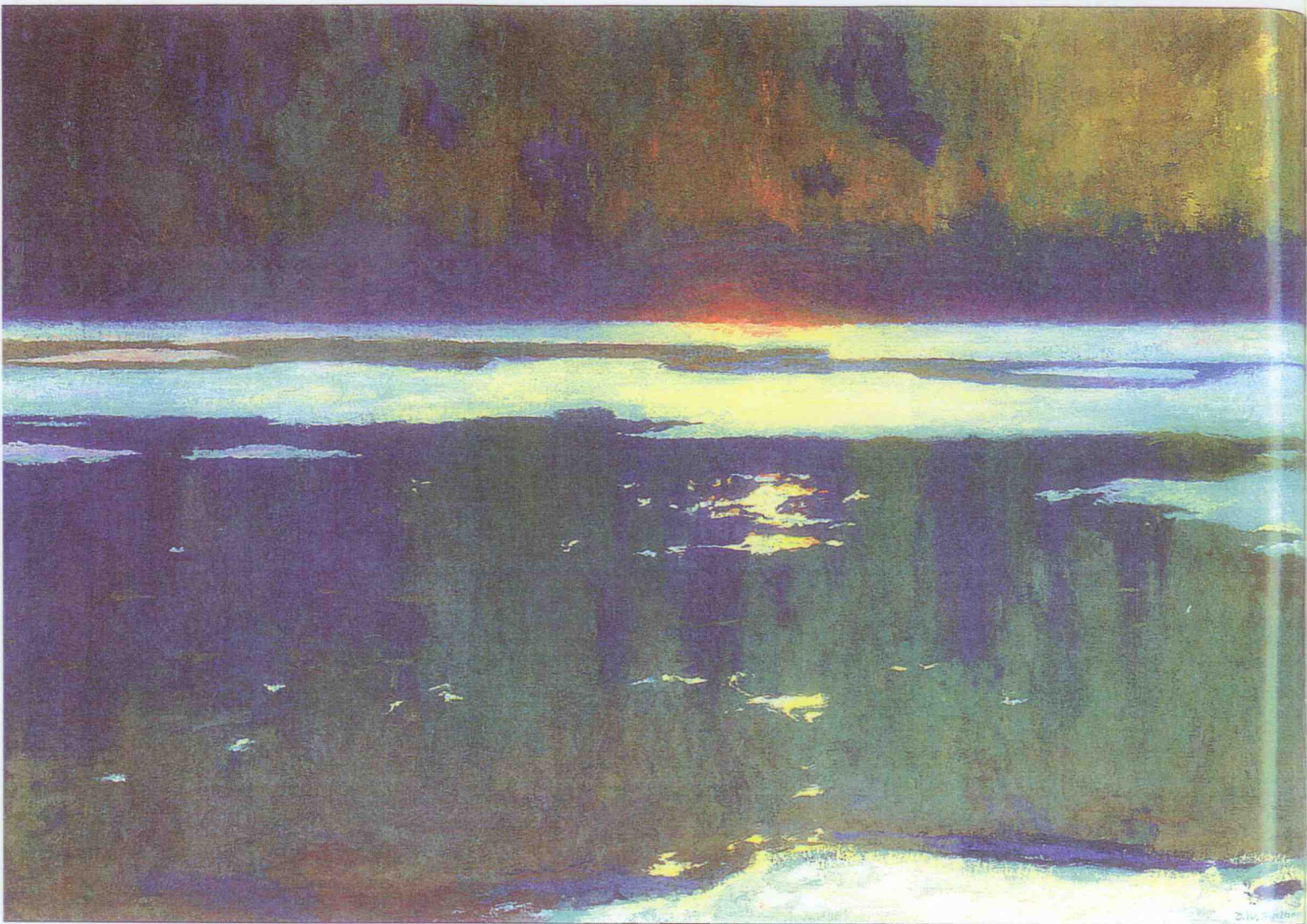
color and another thing to have beautiful color. In my painting, I look for harmonies instead of contrasts and I study from life. If you paint from photos, you lose 60 percent of the color that the eye takes in and the photo, even using the best film, doesn't have true color relationships and subtleties."

Aside from color and subtleties, Pinkham searches intently for a mood as he hikes a location, often with his wife, Vicki, also a painter. "I

do a lot of walking and look for images that convey where I'm at that day," he says. "I become a hunter. Once I find a subject that intrigues me, I sit down and write. If I can say it in words, it helps me edit all the visual information and come close to the root of the emotion I'm feeling. That way I'm closer to it when I begin to paint."

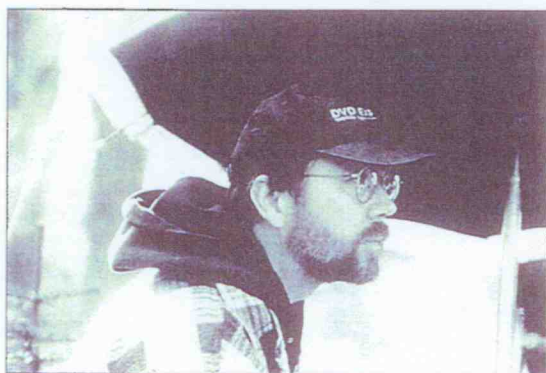
Pinkham stepped up to the easel early in life. When he was just 3, his morning ritual included toddling





*Dawn's Peace, oil, 40" by 60"*

*"After September 11th, I found solace experiencing the simple wonders of absolutes."*



next door to visit neighbors Charlotte and Paul, who would give him a cookie and a peeled banana. One morning, however, a new scent interrupted the usual visit, and the two adults escorted the young Pinkham into a room where a nun sat busily painting. When the curious child fixated on the canvas and drank in the paint smells, Sister

Camille offered to paint his picture if he'd return the next day wearing his favorite shirt.

"I was fascinated by the odor of paint, and it filled all my senses," Pinkham says. "I came the next day in my Superman suit. I loved that suit and absolutely lived in it." Of course, Sister Camille made good on her promise to paint the portrait, but soon she was gone and Charlotte and Paul moved and also disappeared from his life.

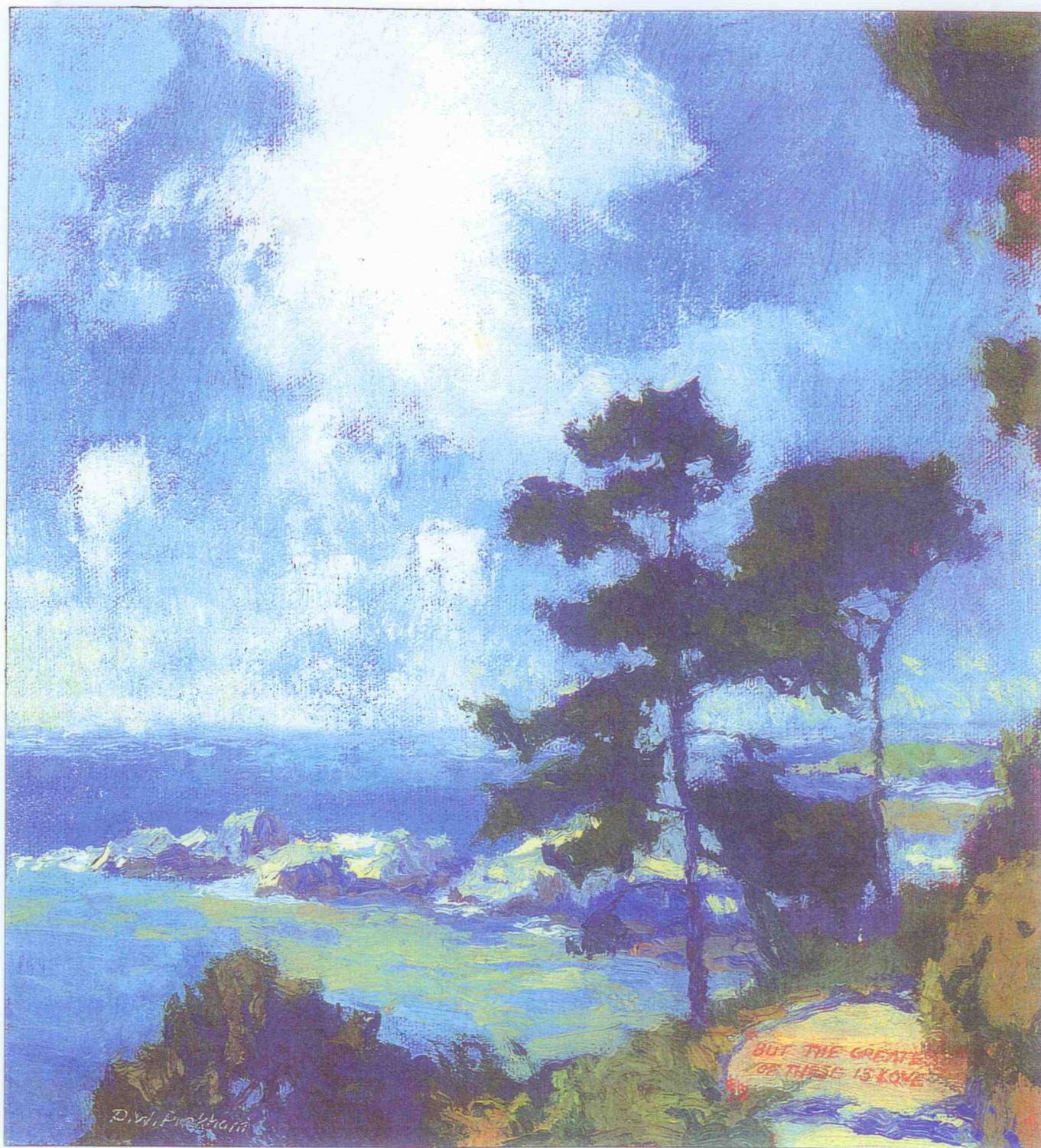
"I spent the next 15 years pursuing art," Pinkham says, adding that he often spent more time in the principal's office than in art class, but he did earn recognition as the school's unofficial artist. "I spent years in my room painting. I was always search-

ing." Following his high school graduation, that search led to a Los Angeles area junior college and, eventually, to the Art Center College of Design. The restlessness persisted, however.

In his frustration, Pinkham ultimately asked, "Who can teach me color?" He was told to study with "an old Russian guy, but he's difficult to get along with." That "guy" was legendary artist Sergei Bongart, who was then living in Santa Monica. Pinkham called him, and Bongart said he would see Pinkham immediately. "I walked into his place and felt like I was home," Pinkham says of his first encounter with the artist.

Alternating between day classes at the Art Center and night classes with Bongart, Pinkham again crossed paths with former neighbors, Charlotte and Paul, when they called his father, a plumber, for help





*The Greatest of These is Love, oil, 12" by 11"*

*"I painted this for one of my best friend's wedding. I felt the image contained a sense of unity and yet the 'whisper of leaves,' as Sergei would say."*

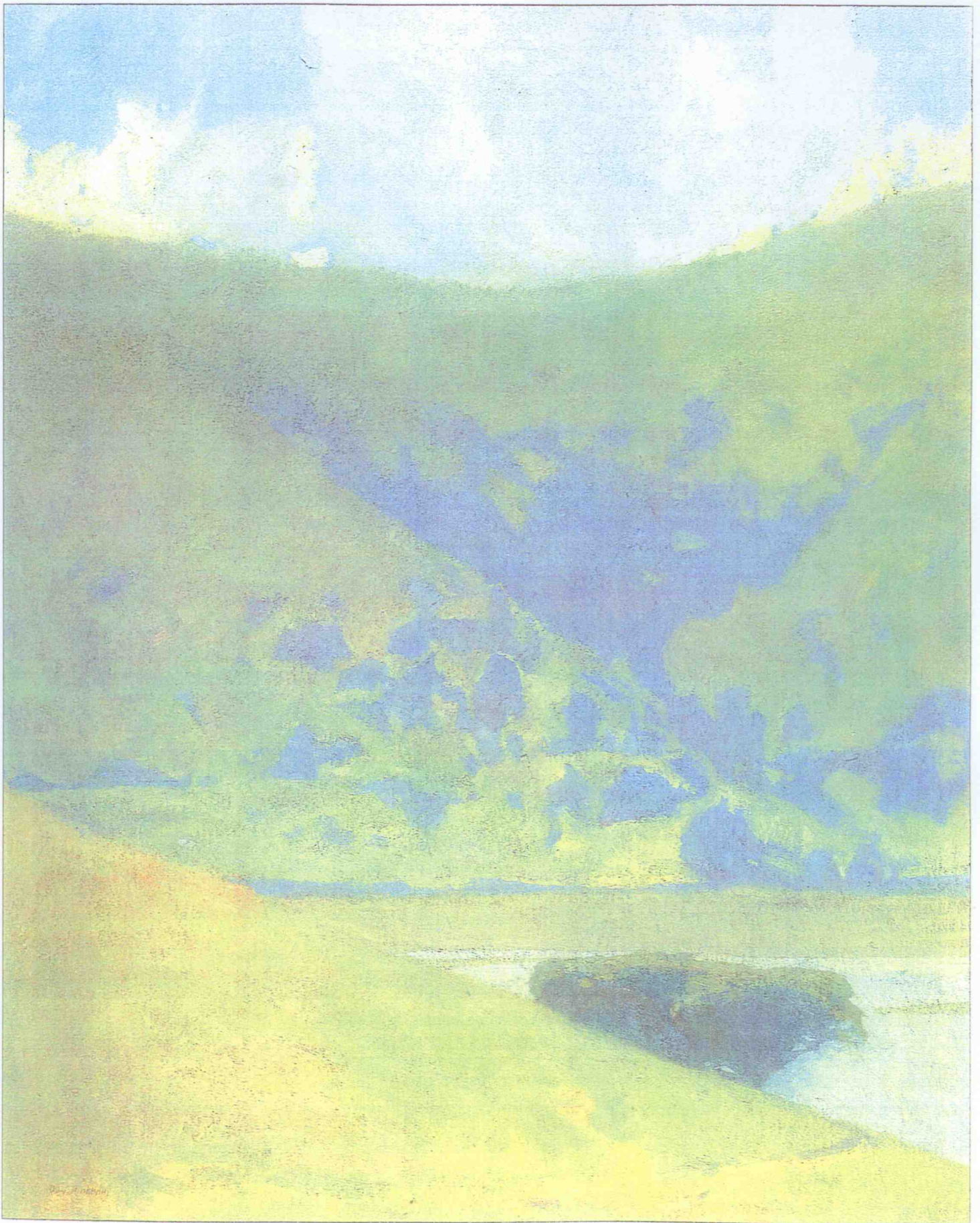
with a plumbing problem. Pinkham and his father headed across Los Angeles to the house of their former neighbors, who gingerly revived the ritual of a cookie and peeled banana. As an added bonus, Sister Camille joined them. When the nun inquired about Pinkham's life, he said he was currently studying with Bongart. Sister Camille smiled and said that

she had been studying with Bongart when she'd first met Pinkham. "It was 17 years later, and we'd come full circle," Pinkham says. "That was overwhelming to me."

Pinkham's initial studies with Bongart proved formative and intense. "Sergei believed that artists are born not created," he says. "You can create a painter, but not an

artist." Sergei's austerity wasn't lost on Pinkham, and he took away a notion of humility more than any sort of technique. But the euphoria of exploring art with the no-nonsense Russian was short-lived. When his father died, Pinkham stashed his brushes and paints and plunged headlong into the plumbing business, keeping his father's com-

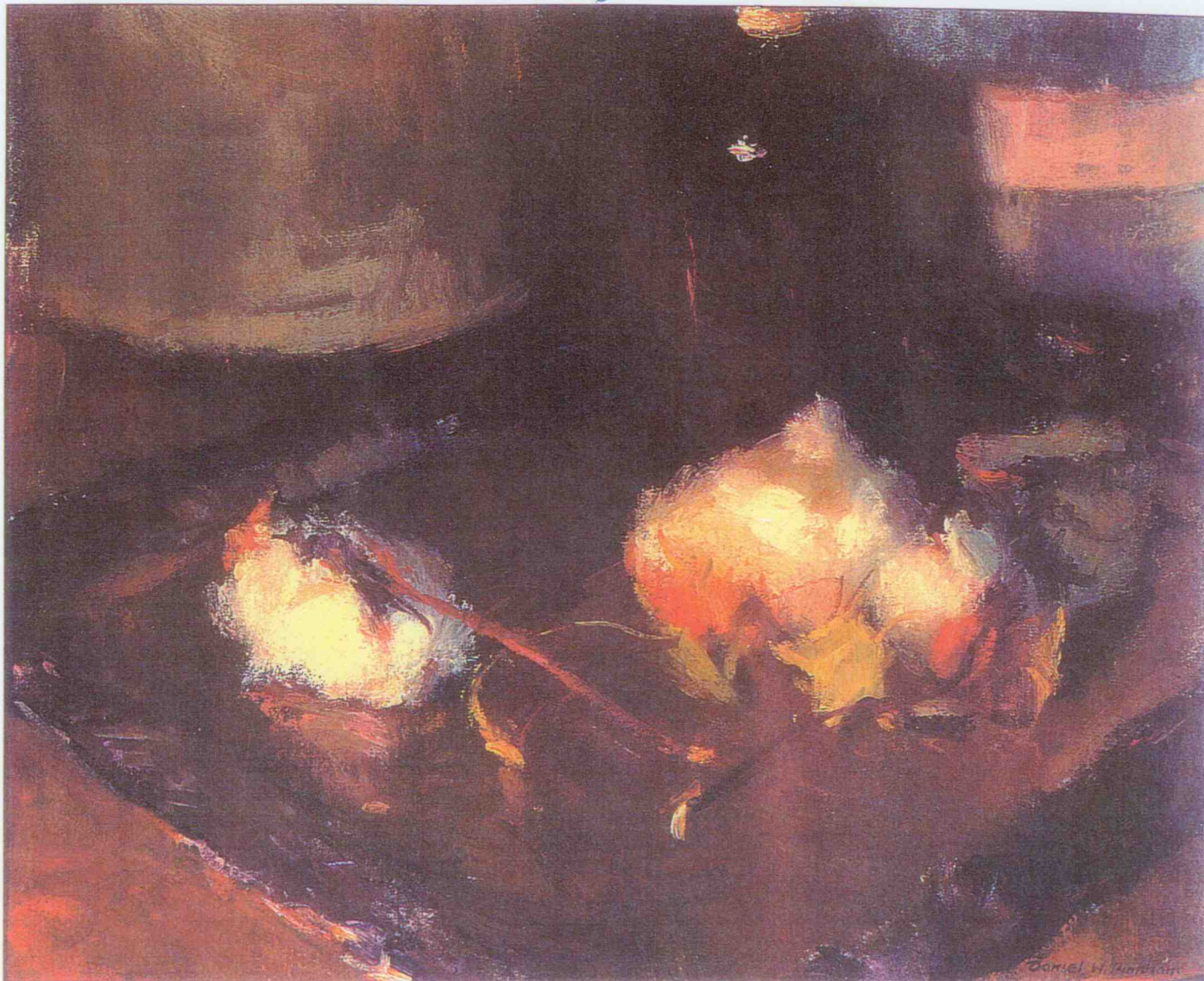




*Patience*, oil, 40" by 32"

*"Making myself available to subjects that contain principles of the secret visual language that exposes the divine character of man is why I paint today. This painting was a breakthrough for me. I started to understand that the gift of interpretation could include a visual language."*





*Cotton, oil, 18" by 22"*

*"Cotton, one of the many crops that we grew in North Carolina, is based on the humble and deep spiritual values instilled in me by my grandparents and dad. The staging of light is reminiscent of the glow from our pot belly stove in our small farmhouse. Nothing I paint will ever measure the love I feel towards them. I miss everything about those days."*

pany alive, sometimes putting in 100 hours a week. Bongart reacted disapprovingly to the sacrifice, something Pinkham attributes to Bongart's own decision years earlier to help his own parents in a similar manner. But Pinkham persevered and, after he was able to pay off the mortgage on his mother's house, he picked up where he left off. He bought a plane ticket to Idaho, where Bongart was conducting his summer workshops. The two hadn't spoken a word to each other for eight years.


As Pinkham entered Bongart's lecture that day, uninvited and unannounced, the old Russian interrupted his comments to make his way into the darkened room to see who had entered. Pinkham recalls the

moment well. "He came up to me and said, 'You look eight years younger. Are you ready to paint?' Then he offered me a full scholarship."

Bongart had changed little. He drilled students for hours and days, using the same models. Pinkham worked in black and white for a full year before moving into color. "That was the greatest lesson I could have ever had," he says of the immersion in black and white. "It taught me subtlety. Most artists paint by contrasts, but this allowed me to paint parts of my personality and character."

These days, Pinkham concedes that Bongart's stern apprenticeships taught him to live like an artist and to give back to others. Bongart also reinforced Pinkham's strong work ethic, which remains key in both his

art and other ventures, including his restoration of a condemned building that was designed as a replica of the old chapel Michelangelo used for his studio outside Rome. Three years into salvaging what Pinkham describes as "a ruin," he and Vicki consider it their home and another spiritual building block.

Art, however, remains the major focus for the talented Pinkham, whose future was, in a sense, almost pre-ordained. You see, in Scottish, the name Pinkham means "artist of the village." 

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