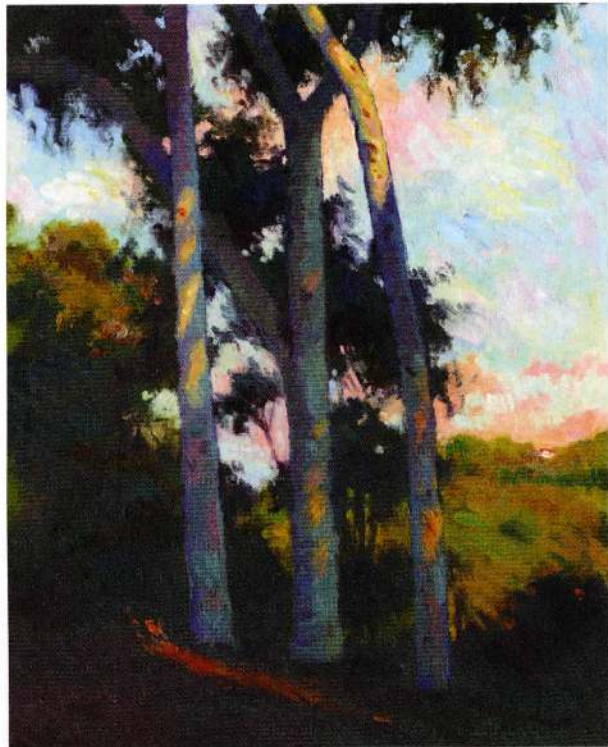


BELOW

Palos Verdes Eucalyptus

by Rick Humphrey, 2008, oil, 20 x 16.

All artwork this article private collection unless otherwise indicated.



RIGHT

California Lupin in Antique Vase

by Victoria Pinkham, 2006, oil, 12 x 12.



BELOW

As the Lilies of the Field

by Daniel Pinkham, 2005, oil, 24 x 36.

RIGHT

Early Spring Morning, Portuguese Bend

by Amy Sidrane, 2005, oil on canvas on panel, 24 x 18

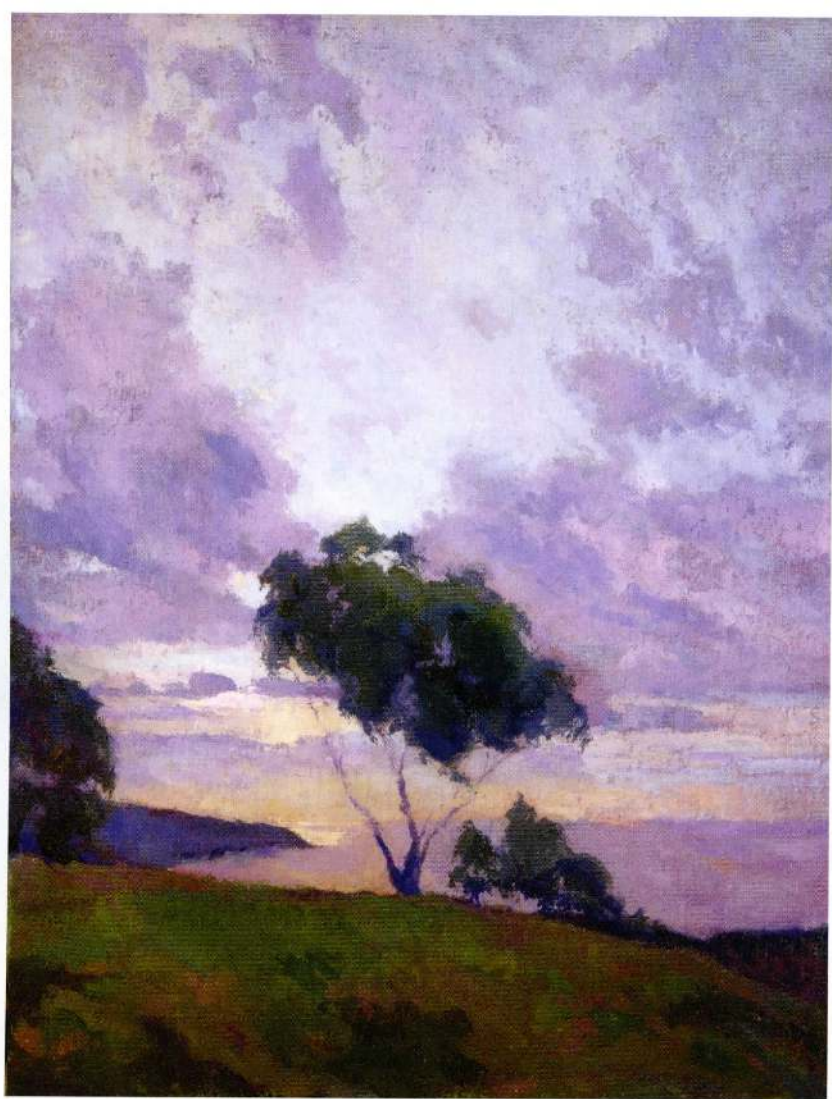


❧ The Portuguese Bend ❧

ARTIST COLONY

After years of friendship, this group of California painters—who share a passion for recording the beauty of the Palos Verdes Peninsula—decided to come together to help preserve the land that first inspired them.

BY NAOMI EKPERIGIN



“**T**he very first show was just about raising awareness,” says Amy Sidrane when asked about the inaugural exhibition of paintings by a group of artists who would soon become known as the Portuguese Bend Artist Colony (PBAC). It was nearly 14 years ago and featured the work of Sidrane, along with Rick Humphrey and Daniel Pinkham. “We were calling the public to wake up and recognize the beauty around them,” Sidrane continues. “It wasn’t about marketing ourselves. We had such a passion for the open space.” Growing up on the Palos Verdes Peninsula, a close-knit group of coastal cities in southwestern Los Angeles County, the trio had always shared a love of art and the outdoors. “Rick and I went through high school and the Art Center College of Design together,” Pinkham says. “Amy and I started the first plein air group in our area in the 1970s. We’ve always been friends through art.”

The idea of using art to help the community had been brewing for some time, but it took a plein air painting session—of course—to bring it to fruition. “One day Rick was out painting and came across a hiking group on one of the trails,” Pinkham recalls. “The group’s guide was Bill Ailor, who had started the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy [PVPLC].” Ailor’s original goal was to prevent development of the land below the McBride Trail, which offers stunning views of the ocean and nearby Catalina Island. Humphrey shared his idea with Ailor, who was very receptive. He then recruited Pinkham, who was immediately on board. Amy, who grew up near Rick and was a close friend of



OPPOSITE PAGE, ABOVE

The Artist's Feast

by Stephen Mirich, 1997,
oil on board, 12 x 16.

OPPOSITE PAGE, BELOW RIGHT

Exuberant Spring

by Kevin Prince, 2010, oil on canvas
on panel, 48 x 44.

OPPOSITE PAGE, BELOW LEFT

Morning Light, Monhegan

by Kevin Prince, 2007, oil on canvas
on panel, 18 x 16. Collection the artist.

BELOW

Late in the Day

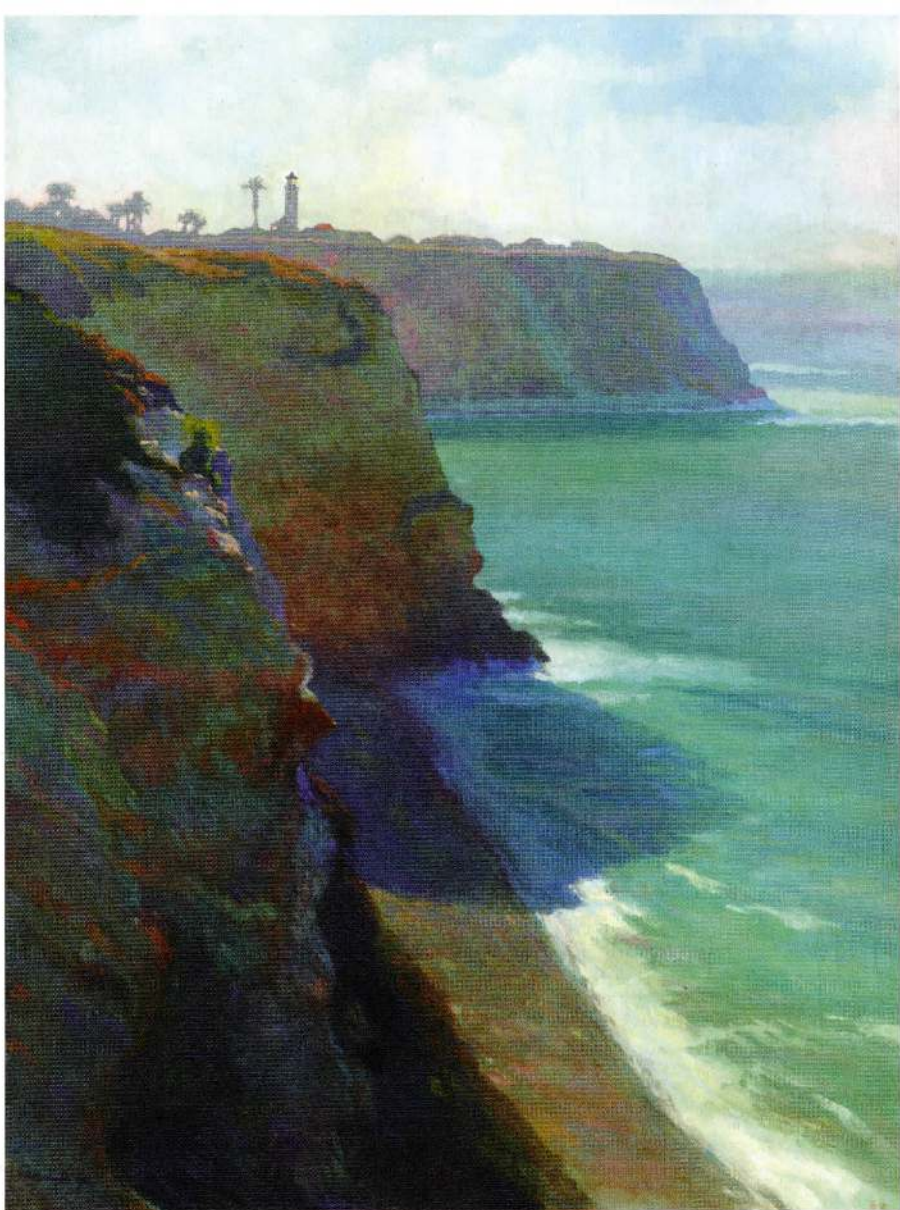
by Stephen Mirich, 2008, oil, 9 x 12.



the Pinkhams, was a natural fit. They embarked on a grass-roots effort that came together out of sheer passion and a deep commitment to conservation—which extended beyond the natural landscape. “We went to the Malaga Cove Plaza Library, which was going to be torn down,” Pinkham recalls. “It was beautiful and should have been a historic site, but they just weren’t getting enough people coming through, so they were going to close it. We asked if we could use the lower meeting room, which had originally been used as a gallery in 1933. We asked for a month but were only given a weekend.”

Although they had only three days to share their work with the world—and, hopefully, raise awareness and money for the PVPLC—the artists made the most of it. “The dream was to put together a quality exhibition from top to bottom,” Sidrane says. “We believed that we wouldn’t get a second chance to make a first impression.” The artists handled everything from painting the walls to printing the programs, and even built temporary walls in the gallery space to help guide viewers through the show and create a museumlike experience. Although completing the task was more than daunting, remembering the bigger picture helped keep them energized and focused. “We thought that if we painted our own backyards, so to speak, it would resonate with people,” Pinkham says. “If they could see their land in these paintings, perhaps they would take ownership of it.”

“We felt there were two groups of people, artists and nature lovers, who needed to know each other,” Humphrey explains. “Many of the people who came to the show were



The Cliffs and Sea at Point Vicente

by Rick Humphrey, 2008, oil, 48 x 36. Collection Terranea Resort, Rancho Palos Verdes, California.

coming to see the paintings and had no idea there even *was* a Land Conservancy.” With education and awareness as their goal, the artists ensured that every element of the exhibition furthered their plans. “We made a program that had a map of the peninsula on it with the hiking trails and land preserves that the conservancy was making,” Humphrey recalls. “Then, we marked the locations that acted as inspiration for our paintings so that people could visit each site and see the land for themselves. As a result, many new individuals contributed to the conservancy—including someone who was so impressed with the exhibition and organization that she wrote a check for \$10,000 on the spot.”

With an opening that exceeded all expectations, the artists immediately began planning the next show—now known as “Portraits of Preservation”—and their membership grew to include Victoria Pinkham, Stephen Mirich, Kevin Prince, and Thomas Redfield. All of the artists live in the area they aim to preserve and have always communicated their love of the landscape through plein air painting. “We just sort of fell together naturally,” Pinkham says. “The seven of us would spend time together anyway.” For a few years they invited guest artists

to include work in the show but found that many of them weren't able to dedicate sufficient time to the conservation efforts that united the group. Such investment was crucial for the show to be a success—and even more necessary as their popularity and mission grew.

When the group exhibited again in 1998 under the name The Portuguese Bend Artist Colony, the Malaga Cove Library gave them exhibition space for five weeks. This time, with four additional pairs of hands—and work from four new artists—they were able to outdo their previous year's effort. Every artist was involved in the planning and execution, and invested many hours in mounting the show—and making sure it stayed up. "The area of the library we were using was used as a conference room during business hours," Pinkham recalls. "At the end of each weekend, we would go back in and take down all 86 paintings, roll out the temporary walls, and return the space to its original condition. When it was time to open up the exhibition again, we'd go back, re-hang everything, and roll the walls back in." It was this level of commitment that helped the Colony's reputation grow exponentially, and ensure a venue for the show each year. "People saw that we were serious," Pinkham says. "Not only did we give a portion of our profits to the land conservancy and the library but we also drew in large crowds, which enabled the library to stay open."

Their all-hands-on-deck approach to mounting the exhibition led to the discovery of hidden talents throughout the process. "Between Steve, Tom, and myself, we have a strong knowledge of construction," Pinkham notes. "We build the walls, mix the colors for them, and put up lights." One would imagine that a passionate, creative group such as this would have a hard time reaching a decision, but in this case, too

California Poppies

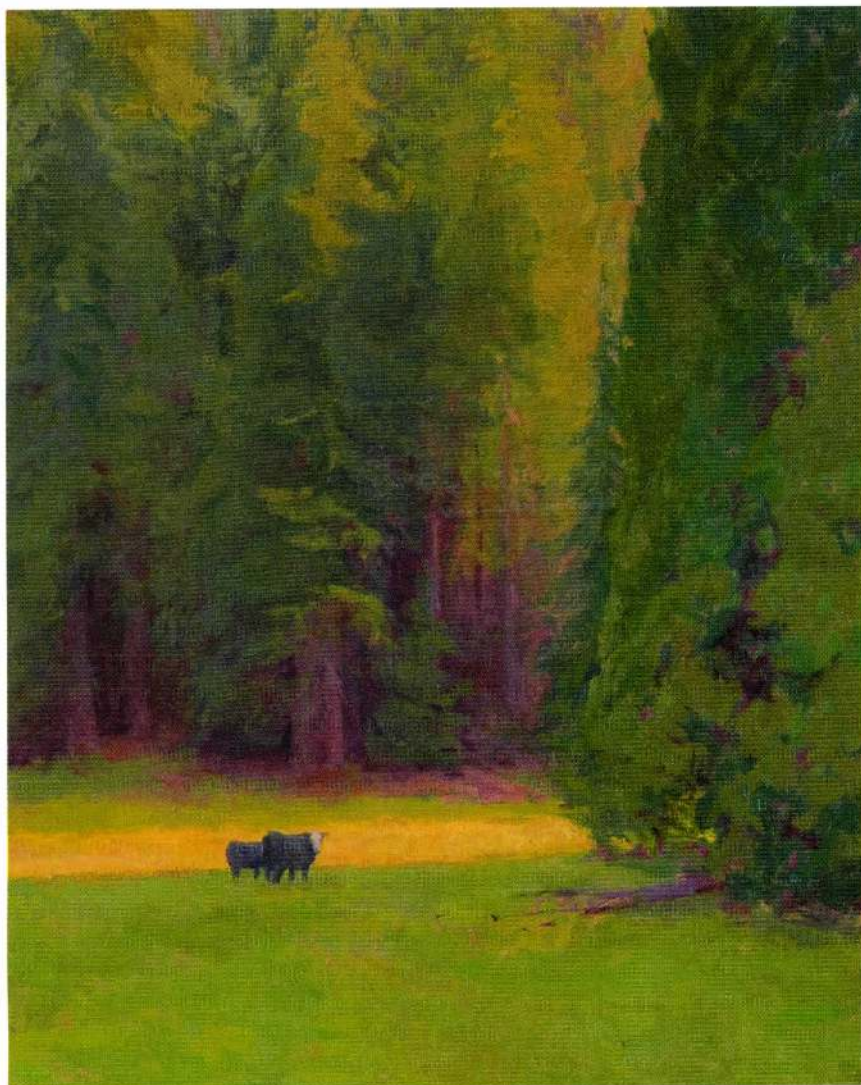
by Victoria Pinkham, 2005, oil, 16 x 16.



many cooks don't spoil the pot. The artists allow one another to take on the tasks that are best suited to their skills and interests and share responsibility equally. "We know one another's strengths and weaknesses," Pinkham says. "We won't ask someone to do something he or she is uncomfortable with." Sidrane echoes this sentiment. "Kevin and Rick are great with graphics, and Vicki and Tom are great with public relations," she says. "Steve has an engineer's mind. He could probably tell you how to build a clock!" When asked what her talents are, Sidrane isn't as quick with a label. "I bring the art," she says with a laugh. "I'm more of a jack-of-all-trades type. If someone needs help with framing, for example, or if Vicki needs help with press duties,

I'm there. I'm also good at listening to people's ideas and mediating on the rare occasions that it's needed."

For many artists, it is this very idea of mediating that makes forming a group so daunting. Those with strong visions and expressive natures—characteristics common among most artists—may find it hard to let go of an idea, or can be sensitive to criticism from a friend or colleague. To make sure the group's goals are met, members need a strong sense of self, a penchant for collaboration, and the willingness to develop a common language. Of course, after mounting 15 shows together, and, for some PBAC members, more than 30 years of friendship, there is a wealth of understanding. Unfortunately, Pinkham notes, this closeness is not



always common among many painters. "Artists need to connect with their artist-friends on a deeper level than just the act of painting," he says. "I think it's important to have a dialogue with other artists and support one another. Painters compete with each other; artists don't. As an artist, you have your own unique voice, and you speak from your personal experience—there's no competition there. As a group of artists with our own voices, we rejoice in one another's successes. When we get together to do a show, we're excited to not only share the work we've created but also see how the others have interpreted the subject. It may seem odd for those who spend most of their time in the studio, but, really, artists are sharers by nature. If we weren't, we wouldn't paint the scene—we'd just look at it and move on."

Although working together has seemed almost effortless, maintaining the schedule required of a yearly exhibition can be difficult, especially when the artists have so many other creative endeavors. "Keeping the vision

Among the Giant Sequoias

by Amy Sidrane, 2010, oil on canvas on panel, 40 x 32. Collection the artist.



Fall Colors

by Thomas H. Redfield, Jr., 2009, oil on panel, 8 x 10.

and mission of an art colony has also been a challenge,” Humphrey notes. “Once our exhibitions started raising a lot of money, people outside of the group would pressure us to do things we felt were not in our best interests. In these instances, we often gather together over dinner and discuss what we think the best approach should be. We make sure our decisions are consistent with our mission statement.”

After 15 exhibitions and thousands of visitors, the PBAC has helped to protect more than 1,600 acres of open space as nature preserves on the Palos Verdes Peninsula through their “Portraits of Preservation” exhibition and sale. Even with their popularity, the group has decided to decrease the frequency of the show. This is not because they feel they’re efforts have come to an end, but because the demands of the show often require other projects and needs be put on hold. All of the members are involved with national shows



Boothbay Maine

by Daniel Pinkham, 2004, oil, 24 x 24.

every year, including the Masters of the American West Exhibition and Sale, hosted by the Autry National Center. Such exhibitions, in addition to the demands of galleries and collectors, make the show—which takes up to six months to prepare—difficult to sustain. “Sometimes you need a break from meeting deadlines,” Sidrane says. “When this happens, we like to go to Boothbay, Maine, to Edward Redfield’s home (he’s the grandfather of PBAC member Thomas Redfield). It’s like a retreat.”

On these trips, the artists are able to get in touch with what has not only

sustained the PBAC but also their personal creative journeys. In Maine, they get to immerse themselves in the landscape and paint just for the sheer joy of it. Although their surroundings may be different from the West Coast beaches that inspire “Portraits of Preservation,” painting and hanging out in the Redfield home fosters a greater appreciation for Palos Verdes. “We want to put out the highest-quality show that we can, and that means not simply churning out paintings,” Sidrane says of their time off. “We don’t want it to become so routine that it loses its beauty.” This is highly

unlikely given the artists’ mastery of their craft and passion for nature and painting en plein air. “The situation kind of evolved and became the perfect venue for us,” Sidrane says. “We’re really in our element. We’re free to create exactly what we want, and we get to paint what we love. It was and always has been about enlightenment and education, and we’ve been free to express ourselves as artists.” ■

Naomi Ekperigin is an associate editor of American Artist.



Left to right: Kevin Prince, Thomas H Redfield, Jr., Rick Humphrey, Stephen E. Mirich, Amy Sidrane, Victoria Pinkham, and Daniel Pinkham at Abalone Cove Shoreline Park.

The Artists of the Portuguese Bend Artist Colony

The seven artists that comprise the PBAC share a love of their local landscape, but as individuals their careers are as impressive as their collective preservation efforts.

Rick Humphrey began his formal art education at the Art Center College of Design, in Pasadena, California, in 1973. From there he joined the staff of The Aerospace Corporation in 1977 as a graphic designer. He is a signature member of the California Art Club, and his work has been in juried exhibitions throughout California. For more on Humphrey, visit www.rickhumphrey.com.

California native **Stephen Mirich** has painted most of his life, but he first received formal training under Theodore N. Lukits (1897-1992) at the Lukits Academy of Fine Art, in Los Angeles, and through private study with Julian Ritter. Mirich is a signature member and past vice president of the California Art Club, founding member of the Portuguese Bend Artists Colony, past artist member of the American Society of Marine Artists, life member and past president of the San Pedro Art Association. For more on the artist, visit www.mirich.net.

Daniel Pinkham was raised in Palos Verdes, California, and has been inspired by the landscape since he was a young boy. The artist has lectured and taught throughout the United States and is a signature member of both Oil Painters of America and The California Art Club. He has exhibited at many notable institutions, including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Autry National Center, in Los Angeles, and the Frederick R. Weisman Museum of Art, in Malibu, California. For more on Pinkham, visit www.danielpinkham.com.

Daniel's wife, **Victoria Pinkham**, began her career in textile design but discovered her love of fine art while studying both textile and museum-gallery management. It wasn't until she met Daniel that she discovered the joy of plein air painting. Her work can be found in many private and corporate collections.

Southern California native **Kevin Prince** earned a B.F.A. in fine-art photography from Long Beach State University, and it wasn't until a chance meeting with Daniel Pinkham that he began to seriously study plein air painting. He is an artist member of the California Art Club.

Thomas H. Redfield, Jr., great grandson of American Impressionist Edward Willis Redfield, was born in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, in 1959. He moved to California as a student at the University of Santa Barbara and has made a home there ever since. His landscapes can be found in public and private collections across the country.

Amy Sidrane moved to the Palos Verdes Peninsula from Hartford, Connecticut, when she was a teenager. She received a scholarship to study with Sergei Bongart, whom she credits for providing her with a strong traditional foundation in aesthetics. Her work has been exhibited in many notable institutions, including the Los Angeles Natural History Museum, as well as in galleries in New Mexico, Arizona, Idaho, Colorado, and California. In 1998 she was awarded the Gold Medal for landscape painting at the California Art Club's 89th Annual Gold Medal Exhibition. Sidrane is an artist member of the California Art Club. For more on the artist, visit www.amysidrane.com.