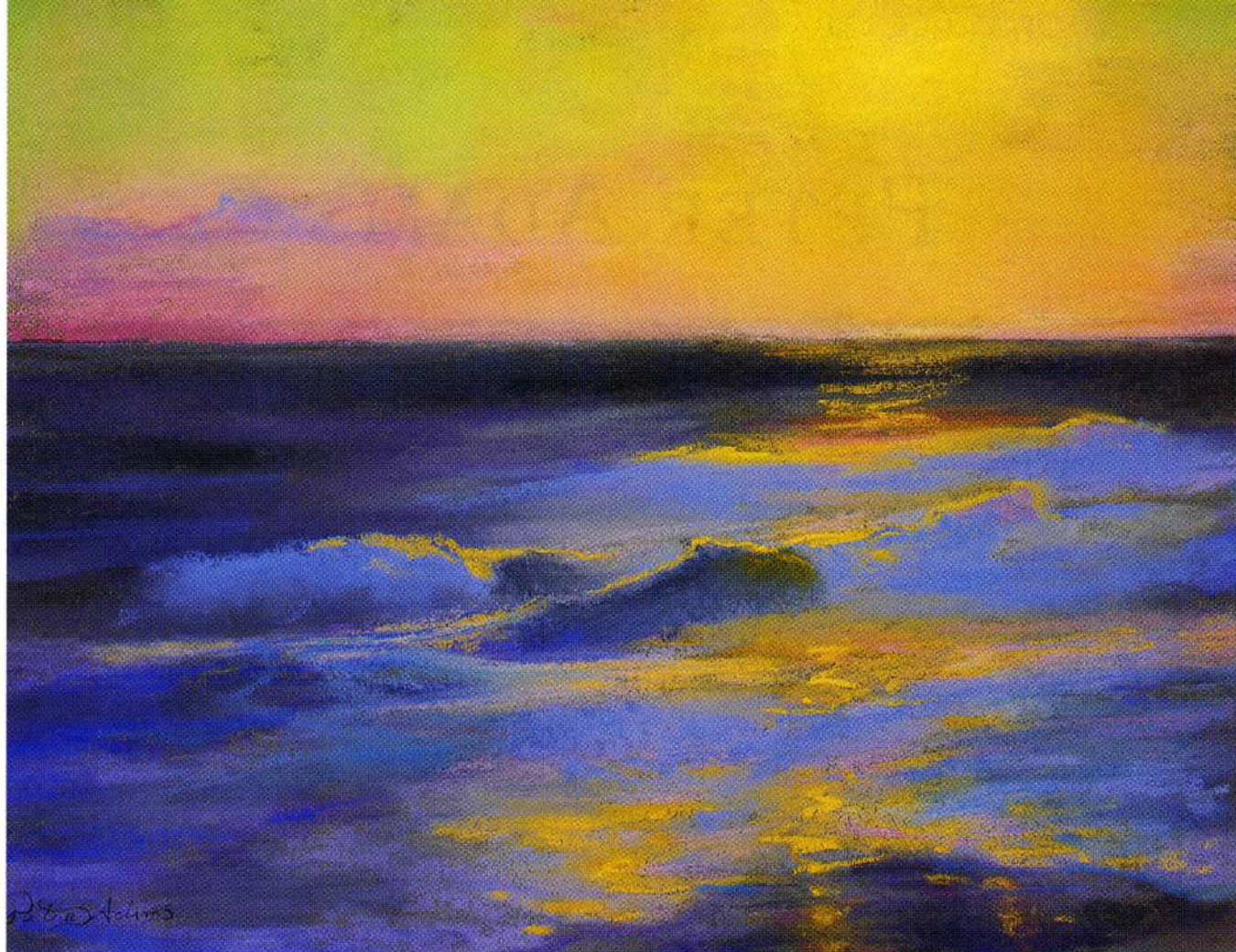


PETER ADAMS



Light of Ornavasso, oil on board, 30" by 30"



Harmony at Sunset, 2001, pastel, 12" by 16"

"Nearly every evening, when Elaine and I are vacationing at our beach house in northern San Diego County, I take my pastels and three dogs and sit on the beach, along with friends and neighborhood children, to sketch the sunset over the Pacific. I especially enjoy painting these scenes, as it puts me in a meditative mood. Although I'm looking at the same scene every night, each natural effect is entirely unique, and the pastel medium is ideal for these scenes, as it allows me to try to quickly capture fleeting moments."

Peter Adams

REUNITING HUMANITY WITH NATURE

By Stanley Cuba

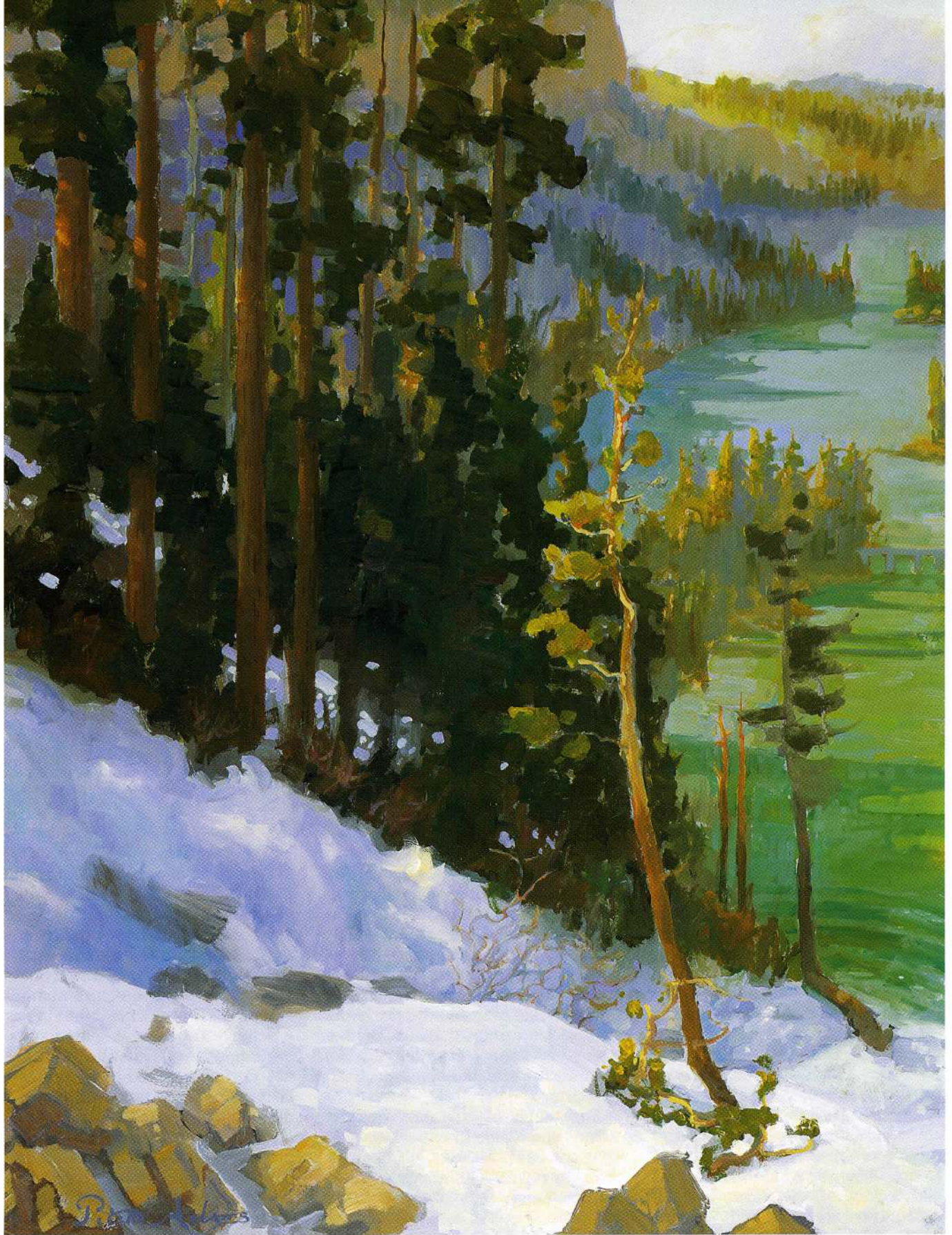
Afghanistan is a world away from Peter Adams' comfortable home and studio in Pasadena, California. Yet the war against terrorism being fought in the Middle East, as a consequence of the September 11 tragedy, has a haunting immediacy for him. In the fall of 1987 he was the first American artist to work on location during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

Adams' visit was part of a seven-month Asian painting trip to Pakistan,

Bhutan, Tibet, China and India. "I have always been fascinated by ancient civilizations, with their wonderful art forms and customs," he says. "But these cultures are slowly disappearing, and nowhere is this as evident as in Asia. Someday it will all be gone, just as our American Indian culture has vanished in comparison with what it once was." (In 1981, Adams was also the first American artist to travel unescorted through the People's Republic of China.)

Adams, whose interest in Afghanistan was heightened after the 1979 Soviet invasion, wanted to preserve on canvas the beauty of an ancient culture under siege, while also aiding the Mujahideen resistance fighters. "My idea was to paint what I saw and then sell those paintings upon returning to the United States and donate the proceeds to the Afghan cause," he says.

Dyeing his blond hair black and donning the garb of an Afghan



Cascading Falls; Mamie Lake, Eastern Sierra, 2001, oil, 24" by 18"

"This was a challenging subject for me. In this painting, I'm dealing with two perspectives: one that is looking down onto the snow and the cascading waterfall that approaches the lake, while at the same time I'm looking straight ahead towards the Sierra range beyond. I was particularly intrigued with the contrast between the cold feeling of the snow and the warmth of the sunlight on the lake."



Sunset at Abalone Cove; Palos Verdes, 1998, oil, 16" by 20"

"Whenever I visit my friends, artists Steve Mirich and Dan Pinkham in Palos Verdes, I love to paint the coves in front of their homes. Portuguese Bend and Abalone Cove are areas that both Dan and Steve have been working hard to preserve from over-development. In this particular scene, I was attracted to the sunlight on the churning waves against the rocks, while the sea beyond remains calm."

rebel, Adams crossed the legendary Khyber Pass and slipped into Afghanistan under a sheet in an ambulance. Traveling with 15 Mujahideen of the National Islamic Front (NIFA), he managed to produce more than 100 paintings during his six-week stay.

Only after Adams returned to the United States did he learn that the Soviets in Afghanistan had placed a \$10,000 bounty on Americans—dead or alive. "Although the Mujahideen could have turned me in for what to them was an enormous amount of money, they treated me with respect and kindness," he says. In fact, Adams was so impressed with his treatment in Afghanistan that he donated a portion of the sales from his paintings to the International Medical Corps, a Los Angeles-based organization that sets up medical clinics inside Afghanistan and provides aid to refugees.

The exhibition and sale of his Afghanistan paintings at a gallery in Los Angeles brought with it an unforeseen—and unexpected—turn of events, when Adams met Elaine Selby, a bright, young woman he married two years later. He considers their chance encounter the highlight of his career, thankful for the woman who two years later became not only his wife, but his staunchest supporter and partner.

For much of the past decade Adams and Elaine have been revitalizing the California Art Club, endeavoring to regain for the organization the national reputation it once enjoyed. The club was founded in 1909 by several well-known artists—Carl Oscar Borg, Frank Tenney Johnson, Hanson Puthuff and William Wendt—and in its heyday included California plein air painters whose work continues to be highly regarded today.

Despite its enviable traditions, the California Art Club faced the real possibility of extinction in the 1980s. As a successful, Los Angeles-area artist, Adams considered the organization worth saving, as a part of his own and his native state's cultural heritage. He also viewed the club as a vehicle for promoting traditional art in Southern California. "We are not against modern art," he says, "but we feel that traditional art just doesn't get the attention it should."

While Adams has been the club's president since 1993, he credits Elaine with much of the necessary day-to-day work, including publication of a newsletter some eight times a year. An extensive program of exhibitions, lectures, field trips and networking among the group's 700-plus members helps to foster classical training and high standards in traditional fine art.

A master signature member of the



Force of Destiny; Monument to Victor Emmanuel II; Rome, Italy, 1998, oil, 36" by 48"

"Symbolism and allegory have always been my passions. In this painting of Rome's Victor Emmanuel building at night, I have tried to show the mysterious hand of Providence that shaped Italy into a unified nation."

Oil Painters of America, Adams also is a signature member of the Pastel Society of America and the Plein Air Painters of America. He serves on the board of trustees of the Pacific Asia Museum in Pasadena, on the advisory board of directors of the Academy of Art College in San Francisco, and on the board of the American Society of Classical Realism. In 1997, he co-founded the California Art Academy and Museum in Pasadena, an institution that is still in the funding stage but has conducted some workshops locally.

As a fourth-generation Californian, Adams' commitment to the California Art Club and his family's deep roots in the Pasadena area bespeak a strong attachment to traditional values in art. As a youngster, he was introduced to the fine arts through the extensive Oriental art collection

of his paternal grandmother, herself an amateur painter. "Her home looked like an Asian art museum," he recalls, "and each of my visits gave me an intimate appreciation of Oriental art—especially the high quality of craftsmanship and elegant design. I became entranced by the exotic costumes, and my perspective of nature was molded by Sung Dynasty landscapes."

In preparation for a fine arts career, Adams studied at the Art Center College of Design and the Otis Art Institute, both located in Los Angeles, and at the Instituto de Bellas Artes in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. But not until he enrolled at the Lukits Academy of Fine Arts (now defunct) in Los Angeles, did he find the traditional art philosophy and instruction methods he had been seeking. He spent

seven years at the academy, eventually serving as an apprentice to renowned mural, landscape and portrait painter, Theodore N. Lukits (1897-1992).

Lukits gave Adams a classical art education—including drawing from plaster casts—and deepened his appreciation of Asian antiquities. Today, in their Pasadena home and studio, Adams and Elaine surround themselves with many Oriental art objects they have inherited and collected. "The decorative qualities of Imari porcelain and the spiritual messages represented by Buddha, Kwan Yin and Lohan sculptures remind me of the importance of looking at nature as a two-dimensional design, as three-dimensional space and as a spiritual retreat," Adams says.

Adams' sense of design and color



Afghanistan Supply Line, 1988, oil, 48" by 60"

"The men in this painting were the Mujahideen soldiers from the National Islamic Front of Afghanistan with whom I traveled in 1987. This scene depicts them carrying medical supplies and ammunition to several locations inside Kunar Province."

harmonies, which distinguish both his landscapes and genre scenes, derive from his love of the late 19th Century European Symbolists and Art Nouveau painters. Besides giving Adams an appreciation for a wide array of artistic styles, Lukits introduced him to works by the early California painters, which resulted in a longstanding commitment to plein air painting. While working on location, Adams often feels in tune with the words of William Wendt, a founder-member of the California Art Club: "Here, away from conflicting creeds and sects, away from the soul-destroying hurly-burly of life, it feels that the world is beautiful, that man is his brother and God is good."

On location, Adams says, he is "inspired by the changing light, the variations in cloud formations, the rugged outcroppings of boulders, and the grand trees that have withstood the extremes of nature. When

painting trees, I shape and edit them to my liking—the result of my training in bonsai, the Japanese art of pruning miniature trees to have the character and beauty of larger ones."

In selecting subjects to render in oil, tempera and pastel, Adams seeks out ephemeral views. "I am painting a mood, not a literal scene with every detail," he says, adding that he prefers a bright palette to one in the middle range. His ethereal handling of subject matter creates fascination and mystery, freeing the viewer to operate on multiple levels of interpretation.

"A scene has to strike me and be interesting in terms of composition before I'll paint it," Adams says. "Most of the paintings I show in galleries were probably started on location. My field sketches tend to be less edited, and I finish 90 to 95 percent of a work outdoors. Working on location allows me to see subtle changes that I wouldn't notice in a

photo, for example, but which I can add to my painting on site. I feel a reverence and a closeness to nature that I can't experience in the studio. It's peaceful and relaxing when I'm out there alone."

Some of Adams' more memorable moments painting on location have occurred during his two trips to Asia. Traveling on foot much of the time, he ended up in remote Chinese villages where he felt he had stepped back in time several hundred or several thousand years. "As curious about me as I was of them, the Chinese were more intrigued by the hair on my arms than my art," Adams says. "Quietly and cautiously they approached and gently blew on my arms to watch the hairs wave."

Although primarily known for the plein air canvases from his trips to Asia, Italy, and France, as well as throughout southern California, Adams paints portraits and still lifes



Sunset in Tuscany; Fogliano near Siena, Italy, 1998, pastel, 12 3/4" by 16 3/4"

"I particularly enjoyed this sunset for its color harmonies. With its great countryside and wonderful people, Italy is always inspirational to paint."

in his studio where he also puts the finishing touches on pieces he began outdoors. A disciplined artist, he usually arrives at his spacious, well-lit studio early in the morning, often staying into the evening. When preparing for a show, it is not uncommon for him to work on 20 or 30 paintings simultaneously. "I think about how they look together, so I'll work on many of them at the same time to make the exhibit look like one painting."

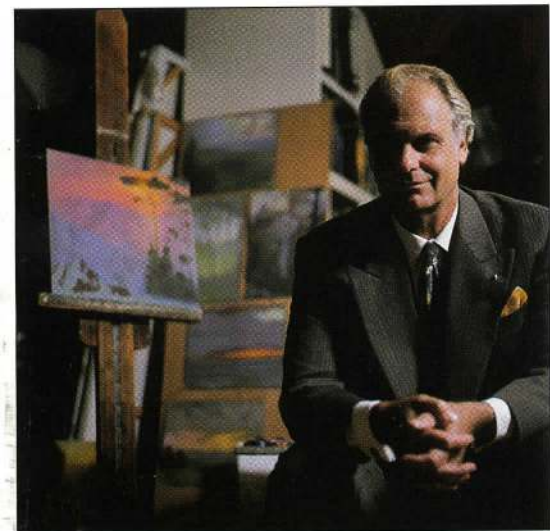
Adams also lavishes much attention and money on his frames. "They help to complete my paintings, functioning as an organic whole," he says. "It is part of my Oriental sense of design."

When he wants a break, Adams steps onto his studio deck to admire the magnificent San Gabriel

Mountains, or the nearby eucalyptus, pine, redwood and sycamore trees that often appear in his paintings. He enjoys the inspirational view of the waterfall, flowers and 50 bonsai trees in his own garden, which he tends for at least an hour a day. If Adams needs a longer respite from his easel, he jogs, surfs or camps with Elaine at various sites in southern California.

Adams places great value on his link with nature. "It is one of an artist's duties to reunite humanity with nature," he says. "I hope that my landscapes remind others of the intimate relationship we share with all things." □

Stanley Cuba is a writer living in Denver, Colorado.



AS FEATURED IN
ART *of the* **WEST**
March/April 2002
Reprinted By Permission