



Artist Profile

DANIEL PINKHAM

THE SPIRITUAL SIDE OF ART

by Elaine Adams

ALTHOUGH HE DOESN'T speak about it openly, there is an intriguing mystical quality about Daniel Pinkham's work, and about his life. Being part Cherokee Indian, Dan believes that because of countless generations of "civilizing" influences, most people in our modern-day society have lost a closeness to God, the earth, and their keen sense of perception. Dan describes countless personal episodes where some higher

force has directed him. For instance, when his car was demolished by a hit and run driver, Dan placed his hands on the skid marks, and instantly visualized the home and surroundings of the culprit. After following his acute senses for five miles all throughout streets he had never before seen, he went directly to the home of the fugitive. The astonished driver confessed, and paid for all the damages.

The Peace of God that Passes all Understanding

18" x 24" oil



Daniel Pinkham painting at Etretat on the coast of France

Another mystical incident has to do with the first annual **Mission San Juan Capistrano Plein Air Painting Event**. He had only one day to paint, as he was scheduled to go out of town. What to paint? One morning, he awoke with the words, "the Lord is my Shepherd". Acting on faith, he drove to the Mission and sat in the Serra Chapel to pray for guidance. There in front of him was a small crucifix; that morning's message immediately came to mind. He painted the image of the crucifix while using a pair of binoculars from the second row pew. On Dan's canvas, the modest figure of Jesus had grown to a solemnly powerful thirty-inch torso. For this painting, Dan was awarded the \$3,000 second prize from **Mrs. Joan Irvine Smith**.

Daniel W. Pinkham ("W" for Warren, a family name) was born on January 31, 1952 in Los Angeles, California to Cathryne



and Braxton Pinkham. He was the youngest of three siblings by sixteen years. At the age of three, Dan had a life defining experience. Once, when visiting his next door neighbor, he was asked to meet their houseguest. Upon entering the room, the boy was immediately overwhelmed by a distinct odor (years later he recognized it as Grumbacher oil painting medium #3). In the corner of the room, he found a nun dressed in her habit seated at a painting easel. The vibrancy of her color palette stimulated Dan's mind and captivated his imagination. Intuitively, he felt a curious sense of comfort. After realizing the immediate connection, **Sister Camille** invited the boy to come over the following day, offering to paint his portrait under one condition, "If you wear your favorite shirt." However, young Daniel did better than that, he wore his favorite outfit — his

Superman suit.

In elementary school, Dan found himself being the "artist". He discovered his identity amongst his school friends who admired his art work. He remembers the time in 6th grade, after moving to Palos Verdes, when his teacher insightfully assigned him to create two large murals for the school. Pinkham recalls, "What an opportunity. To paint with pastel for four hours a day while my classmates were sitting behind me studying and envying me." All throughout his life, Pinkham has been led by proverbial sign posts. He confesses, "I really identify to the Italian movie, *Cinema Paradiso*, where a young boy was guided by a stern old man to follow his passion."

Not to be deterred from his artistic sensitivities, at the age of twenty Dan eventually entered **Art Center College of Design**. There, he counseled with **Donald**

"**Putt**" **Puttnam**, wanting to learn, as Pinkham puts it, "to see reds in eye sockets like **Rembrandt**, or greens on foreheads like **Van Gogh**". This is when Pinkham first heard the name, **Sergei Bongart** (1919-1985), the Russian master.

Unfortunately, life changed over night with the sudden illness of Dan's beloved papa. The road quickly took a drastic detour toward the practical direction of Dan operating a plumbing business and helping to support his parents. After years of working with pipes and wrenches, Pinkham's dad, in his final days, requested that his son continue his art after he was gone. With his family's blessing Dan started back on his path towards art.

Daniel Pinkham's training began at the age of three with Sister Camille, and finally at the age of twenty-eight, he continued with Sergei Bongart. Pinkham considered this to be part of a divine plan. "Sergei", as he was known by his closest students, was the only person that could connect Dan's childhood artistic impressions with his adult aspirations. To further illustrate the "divine plan" and Pinkham's mystical life, he discovered after nineteen years that Sergei's first student in America was a nun named, Sister Camille.

Daniel Pinkham remained a Bongart scholarship student for five years, believing the experience exposed him to higher artistic ideals which could not have been taught by anyone else. However, as he was receiving sensitivity and higher levels of aestheticism from Sergei's teach-

The Other Side

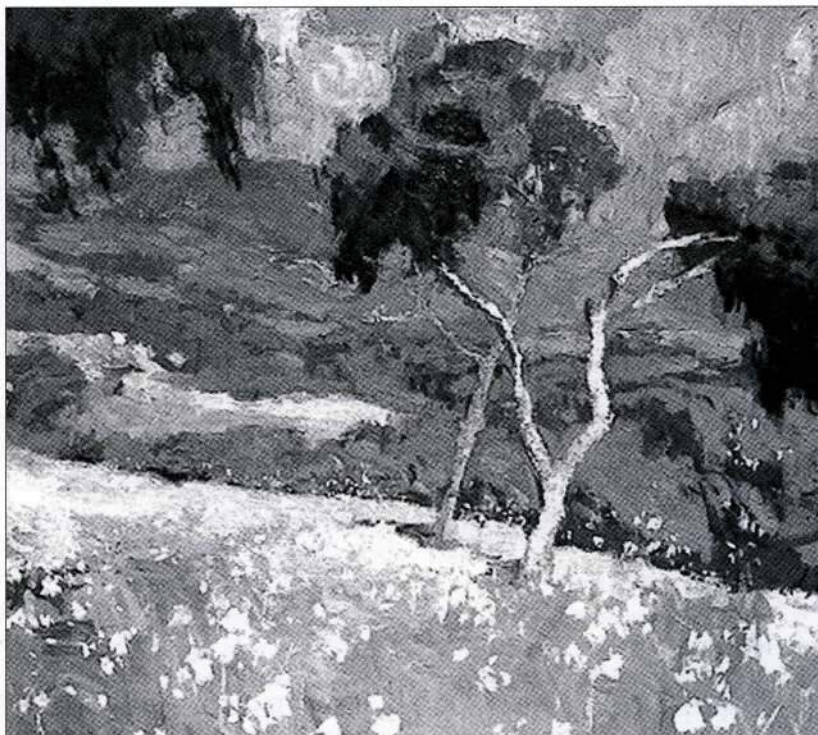
24" x 30" oil





ings, Pinkham was providing perplexity and lower levels of levity through his notorious pranks. These pranks were generally aimed at fellow Bongart students, and occasionally, at Bongart himself. Now and then, he would substitute a demonstrator's white paint for toothpaste on the unsuspecting artist's palette, or improvise a thirty minute hysterical tale that may have been somewhat embellished. In that way his talent for story telling is not unlike that of Mark Twain or Will Rogers.

After his formal training with Sergei, Pinkham began his own school of painting which operated through the late 70s and early 80s. Teaching afforded him the opportunity to exercise his foundation while allowing him the time to accumulate a body of work to show in galleries. It was during this time that he founded the **Plein Air Artists of California (PAAC)**. The group included **Amy Sidrane, Ted Pressett, Bill Perkins, and Ron Riddick**. They referred to themselves as "the PAAC-5". The PAAC-5 traveled, painted and exhibited together in focused, themed exhibitions in such venues as the **Monterey Peninsula Museum of Art**. Pinkham explains his philosophy behind smaller group exhibitions, "If you're going to have group exhibitions, it's better to have a few top quality focused artists than to have an expansive group that is inconsistent and undefined." He observes that in nature, "...a narrow deep-running river has more impact and longevity, whereas a widely spread shallow swamp will eventually dry up and disappear."



Portuguese Bend, Spring

16" x 16" oil

In 1984, after five years of directing his art school, Dan, needing more time for his creative work, decided to close his doors. He headed for Europe with fellow PAAC members. Together, the group spearheaded an artistic movement, known as "Plein Air Painting", which at the time was unheard of. In an effort to promote *plein air* painting on a national basis, in 1989 Pinkham traveled to the Soviet Union on a goodwill mission. There, he was awarded a contract to present plein air art supplies to artists in the United States and Canada. He introduced the use of Russian outdoor painting easels, and for the first time made available in the U.S., specifically-designed artist umbrellas.

Today, Dan and his wife, Vicki, also an accomplished artist, spend seven months a year on the road working from their mobile studio, a converted U-Haul truck complete with all the essential living amenities and an instant 360-degree panoramic view when they lift up the back door and slide off the hidden window panels. When painting on location, Dan sketches direct from nature. His boards range in size, depending on weather condition or light. For instance, a smaller board is used if the moment is fleeting, thereby making it convenient for him to complete his statement. Certain studies or *modellos* are later used for larger studio works. Pinkham refuses to use photos or slides.

Pinkham seems to recognize



the inner most and profound meaning expressed by external forms. He explains, "For me the spiritual world is more real than the concrete world we see around us." He depicts the spiritual essence by the skillful use of simplified masses. His handling and choice of subject is reverential and respectful. He believes in harmonizing colors, often making his works appear poetic and tonal. Pinkham projects his philosophies of color harmony not only to his paintings, but to his gardens and surroundings as well. Using various types of roses including climbers and shrubs, he intentionally arranges combinations to harmonize with the sky. His east-facing flowers range in cool colors of white, silver and lavender roses, morning glories and lilac bushes. While his west-facing flowers harmonize with the setting sun in warm colors of apricot, orange and red roses.

In reflecting about his wife, Pinkham explains, "Vicki represents the ideals I believe in. I have learned a great deal from her. She

is one more example of God working in my life. If people really care to know what inspires me, what leads me, what gets me up everyday, it is in part that I had supportive parents, and that I was born happy and love humor. The other part is my relationship with God. In my private life I enjoy reading and studying scripture, especially Christ's message in the *New Testament*. Having the opportunity to exercise my gift and watching my work grow as I grow personally is a blessing. The true use of art, I believe, is to help the artist develop his own spiritual nature and then present that nature through his art work for all humanity to enjoy." Pinkham feels that in order for an artist's work to grow, the artist must grow spiritually. He expresses, "I believe every element of a person's character shows itself in the surface of his or her painting. Regardless of the subject, every brush stroke, texture and nuance is a direct reflection. So much of my studying has taken place in the great museums of the world. I've

been reminded by artists who lived hundreds of years ago about divine character. In the treatment on the surface they share more about themselves than they could possibly do verbally. So for me, my honesty and sensitivity on canvas won't grow unless it is first reflected in my own life. It's hard work, painful at times, however, compromise is not an option."

Daniel Pinkham has exhibited in numerous museums in the U.S. and is currently represented by Joan Irvine Smith Fine Arts, Inc. in Laguna Beach and San Juan Capistrano, California, and the DeMott Galleries in Vail and Loveland, Colorado.

His childhood artist friends, Amy Sidrane and Rick Humphrey (both CAC Artists) have come together to present Palos Verdes Peninsula: An Artist Interpretation to benefit the Palos Verdes land conservancy. The exhibition is held at Malaga Cove Plaza Library in Palos Verdes Estates, April 6 - 30, 1997.

APRIL LECTURER

LORNA MOORE

... will present a lecture and slide presentation entitled, *The Threatened Urban Landscape*. The focus of this lecture will be on the endangered historic architecture and garden sites that enrich Pasadena, South Pasadena and El Sereno (in Los Angeles County). This lecture is presented to orientate CAC members with these threatened areas in preparation to paint *en masse* in an attempt to bring about public awareness concerning this potential cultural devastation.

Ms. Moore is Founder of **Eminent Reclaim**, an organization working to preserve the historic neighborhoods impacted by the proposed 710 Freeway extension. **SPECIAL NOTE: After the lecture, we will take a car-pool caravan tour of the area.**

Our thanks and appreciation goes to

JEAN STERN

Director of the Irvine Museum in Irvine, California

...for his enlightening lecture on **Alson Skinner Clark**. Mr. Stern related many colorful stories, such as the fact that when running low on canvas while painting the sites at the Panama Canal, Alson Clark sailed back to France just to obtain more supplies. Later, during WWI, working at aerial reconnaissance, Mr. Clark would fix himself and his camera to the wing of a bi-plane in what appeared to be a death defying feat. This is Mr. Stern's third lecture for the California Art Club, and as always he was very popular.