Our Twentieth Anniversary…

January 15, 2013, marks the twentieth anniversary of the public opening of The Irvine Museum. At the time that my mother, Joan Irvine Smith, my grandmother, Athalie Richardson Irvine Clarke, and I inaugurated the museum, in 1992, we made the momentous decision to define our museum not as a brick-and-mortar structure designed by a prestigious architect, but instead to define it as the collection itself and devote our funds toward documenting and preserving this historic art style and having the collection shown throughout the country.

Moreover, it was important to have the museum be an integral part of the community and to make the collection readily accessible to all visitors. We agreed that the collection served no useful purpose being stored in a vault. We wanted everyone to enjoy the paintings.

Today, we know we made the right choice. In the past 20 years, The Irvine Museum has organized 65 shows and 17 traveling exhibitions, and our paintings have been shown in many museums, both large and small, across the United States and Europe.

It has always been my conviction that the best way to convince people that California Impressionism was not only an important American art style and also that the works were of exquisite beauty, was simply to have people see them. In addition, the paintings themselves serve to instruct viewers about the merits of carefully balanced environmental policy. Many of the scenes in our paintings show our land as it appeared over one hundred years ago, long before the massive influx of population that followed the end of World War II. As such, many of the views of unspoiled landscape no longer exist. I have come to the realization that the art has the capacity to show us both what we have lost, and to instill in us the resolution to save what we still can.

Our new exhibition, Lasting Impressions: Twenty Years of The Irvine Museum will feature many of our best known and important paintings. To mark the anniversary, our patrons were invited to join our board of directors and museum staff for a gala evening on Thursday, January 31, 2013.

—James Irvine Swinden, President
Over the years, the Irvine Museum has received numerous gifts of art works from many friends of the museum. These include Jack and Suzie Kennefick, James and Linda Ries, Rory White, Ray Redfern, George and Irene Stern, Josephine N. Milnor, Robert McChesney Bethea, Thomas and Barbara Stiles, Geoffrey Beaumont, the Patricia Clark Myers Trust, the Historical Collections Council of California, and Bruce and Donna Polichar.

The Irvine Museum’s inaugural exhibition in 1993 was *Selections from The Irvine Museum*, which curiously opened not in Irvine but in Scottsdale in 1992, a few weeks prior to our own museum’s grand opening. The exhibition tour was originally scheduled to open at The Irvine Museum, continue to the Fleischer Museum in Scottsdale, Arizona, and then move on to the Oakland Museum. However, as we approached the opening date, it became evident that we could not meet the schedule because our museum, which was undergoing installation of security and lighting, would not be ready in time. We discussed the issue with Mort and Donna Fleischer in Scottsdale and revised the show so that it would be shown first at the Fleischer Museum, then continue to Oakland, and end its tour in Irvine. James Irvine Swinden and I attended the black-tie opening at the Fleischer Museum, as one or both of us have done for every single venue of each traveling exhibition to date.

We published our first Irvine Museum book, *Selections from The Irvine Museum*, as a companion volume to the exhibition, with an introduction by Joan Irvine Smith and essays by Harvey Jones, Senior Curator of the Oakland Museum; Janet Blake, Curator of California Art at the Laguna Art Museum, and myself.

At that time, just after the publication of our first book, Mrs. Smith and the board of directors of the museum instituted a policy that any non-profit institution that requested the museum’s books for its library would receive a complete set in hardbound editions, free of charge. The only requirement was to have the request presented on the institution’s letterhead.
This policy, administered by James Swinden, has been in effect since 1993. One single gift of Irvine Museum books to the California State Library System in 2004 comprised 1,000 sets. To date, it is estimated that more than 3,000 sets of books have been given to libraries in public schools, private schools and colleges, as well as local, county and state public libraries.

In March 2002, The Irvine Museum moved from its twelfth-floor suite to the ground-floor suite of Airport Tower. Our original twelfth-floor suite was restricted in space, so we had to make our offices part of the public exhibition space. Our new home, suite 100, availed us of not only more display space, but also the opportunity to design our floor space to best fit our needs for proper viewing areas as well as private offices.

After seven years of planning and organizing several exhibitions that traveled throughout California and to other parts of the country, we decided that we were ready to send a show to Europe. In 1999, James Irvine Swinden took the lead in producing Masters of Light, an exhibition of the best examples of California Impressionism, gathered from our collections and from those of fourteen private lenders. As we knew that we were going to be judged by a discerning and cultivated audience, we resolved that we would send only the very finest art.

From the outset, this exhibition required extraordinary effort, as there were countless adjustments that came with packing, crating, documenting and shipping an exhibition across international borders. To cite just two examples, all of the crates had to be constructed from pre-approved European wood, not from American lumber, which could harbor insects or organisms that might prove destructive to European trees. The crates also had to be watertight so that they would float in case the cargo plane went down in the ocean.

There was one unique philosophical problem that had to be resolved with the Paris venue. We were told that we could not label this show as an exhibition of “California Impressionism” paintings, as according to the French art public, only paintings painted in France in the 1860s through the 1880s could properly be termed “Impressionist.” To that end, we titled the exhibition Masters of Light and referred to it as a show of “plein air” paintings, from the French phrase en plein-air, signifying that they were painted outdoors. The exhibition was shown in Paris, Krakow and Madrid to excellent reviews and attendance.

As our museum’s programs and activities expanded, and our role as the principal proponents of historical California paintings brought us additional distinction in Orange County, we accepted, in 2004, the opportunity to establish a working association with the Historical Collections Council (HCC) of Orange County. Over lunch one day, James Irvine Swinden and I met with members of the HCC Steering Committee, including Bob Ehrlich, Walter Lachman, Allan Lay, Bob Hall and Ruth Westphal, and agreed to establish a close working relationship.

In addition to the 17 traveling exhibitions and books organized so far, we maintain a rigorous exhibition and educational program at the museum. Due to space limitations of our small museum, we only have one show at a time, which we change every four months. Thus, three times a year, all the paintings are taken down and returned to storage or to their respective owners, and a new show is brought in, installed, labeled and properly lit. To date, we have had over 65 exhibitions at our museum.

All of these remarkable accomplishments in such a relatively brief period of time could not have been achieved without a professional and dependable staff. My entire staff at The Irvine Museum consists of five exceptional people: Merika Adams Gopaul is our Assistant Director, Dora James is our Curator of Education, Judy Thompson is our Coordinator of Visitor Services, Amber Driscoll is our Coordinator of Guest Services, and Don Bridges is our Bookstore Manager.

My twenty years of association with The Irvine Museum have been remarkable, unique in every way, and thoroughly exciting at all times. I take great satisfaction and pride in knowing that I am a part of this noble endeavor.

—Jean Stern, Executive Director
The Irvine Museum’s devotion to community education began when we first opened our doors, over twenty years ago. Over the years, we have had over sixty five exhibitions at the museum and each one was accompanied by an education component. That dedication is as strong today as it was twenty years ago.

All of our exhibitions at The Irvine Museum carry important messages, usually a combination of artistic, ecological and historic character. While many of the basic lessons can be applied to all shows, there are still some new and distinctive challenges. To properly educate our visiting children on field trips, we often need to prepare additional text, images, charts, diagrams and stories for each show. This is seen in the didactic panels that accompany the art, and in the photographs of artists that illustrate selected biographies.

All of this is hard work and we are indeed fortunate to have a small but highly conscientious group of docents at The Irvine Museum. All of them take time from their busy lives to help enrich our students’ and visitors’ appreciation of their visit to the museum. I could not effectively do my job without the dedication of our wonderful docents. So, to our docents, Carole Boller, Cynthia Chilcott, Doreen Hamburger, Candy Horchover, Diane Knight, Catherine Kusnick, Jay Mackro, Carolyn Scheer, Vivian Schultz, Kathy Winton, and Nancee Wright, we are grateful for your participation in our education programs.

—Dora James, Curator of Education

Granville Redmond, *Moonlight Marsh Scene*, oil on canvas, 26 x 43 in., The Irvine Museum
Left to right

Row 1: James & Madeline Swinden, Linda & Jean Stern; John & Marianne Taylor; Scott & Erin Capobianco, Debbie & Greg Hexberg.

Row 2: Lynn Burke, Yvonne Boseker, Janet Blake; Patricia Trenton; Michael & Brenda Drake.

Row 3: Jean Stern & James Swinden welcoming guests.

Row 4: Tim & Mariott Clark; Ruth Westphal & Anita Eaton; Jean Stern, James Swinden, Peter Keller; Cathi Bledsoe, Debbie McKenna, Kathy Winton, Lisa Hilgren.

Row 4: Jim Chiampi, Morton Irvine Smith; guests viewing paintings at the reception.
We are grateful for the generosity and support of our Patrons.

For information on how you can become a part of preserving our history, contact The Irvine Museum at irvinemuseum.org or 949.476.0294.

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