From the President’s Desk

Our Autumn exhibition is entitled *Scenic View Ahead: The Westways Cover Art Program*. Selected from the Automobile Club of Southern California’s art collection, the show consists of fifty-five works of art created from 1928 to 1980. These paintings appeared on the covers of the Automobile Club magazine, originally called *Touring Topics*, and later changed to *Westways*. The exhibition will be displayed at The Irvine Museum from October 11, 2014 through January 15, 2015.

Among the artists represented in this remarkable collection are Alson S. Clark (1876-1949), Conrad Buff (1886-1975), John Frost (1890-1937), Donna Schuster (1883-1953), Maynard Dixon (1875-1946), Phil Dike (1906-1990), Rex Brandt (1914-2000) and many others. The theme of the Automobile Club Collection is California’s natural treasures which became increasingly accessible with the advent of the automobile age. The subjects range from the Sierra Nevada Mountains, to the Mojave Desert, the Giant Redwoods, our radiant coast, and numerous other interesting places along the highway.

This exhibition is a remarkable chance to see the history of Southern California from the point of view of the automobile and how it figures in our everyday life. There is no other way of life in the world that compares to Southern California’s car culture and *Scenic View Ahead: The Westways Cover Art Program* documents and glorifies it so well.

The exhibit at The Irvine Museum will continue through January 15, 2015.

*James Irvine Swinden, President*

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From the Director

In January, 2015, The Irvine Museum will present *California: This Golden Land of Promise*, an exhibition that will display paintings dealing with our state’s remarkable history. Many of the paintings will feature our historic Spanish missions as well as our beautiful landscape.

From the 1540s, California was a distant colony of Spain, somewhat isolated from the mother country until the missions were built. Although the missions in Baja California are older, the first mission in what is now the State of California was founded in San Diego in 1769. For the next fifty years, 21 missions were founded throughout California, stretching as far north as Sonoma County. They were all connected by El Camino Real, the Royal Road or the King’s Highway, which today approximates Highway 101.

In 1821, Mexico declared its independence from Spain and claimed California as a province. In the early 1830s, a series of laws secularized the missions, thus taking them and their vast land holdings away from the Catholic Church, and through the land grant system, were given to large cattle ranchos.
The Rancho Period, lasting until the American conquest of California in 1848, was characterized by vast ranchos in Southern California, some comprising over 100,000 acres or more. At this time, California’s main product was cattle, not for the meat but for the hides, horns and fat, which was turned into tallow.

By 1850, when California became the 31st State of the Union, most missions were abandoned and in ruins. Through an executive order, President Lincoln returned what was left of the mission buildings to the church. It was not until the 1890s, when artists began to portray the missions as relics of California’s romantic past that a serious effort was made to preserve and restore them.

The earliest views of the California missions in our exhibition are selections from a set of etchings by Henry Chapman Ford (1828-1894), published in 1883. The oldest painting on display is the courtyard of the Mission San Juan Capistrano, painted by Alexander Harmer (1856-1925) in 1886. At the time, what is now one of the most beautiful gardens in California is shown as a dry, dusty yard, with just a few geraniums growing against the pillars of the arcade.

_California: This Golden Land of Promise_ is accompanied by two informative and fully illustrated books on the remarkable history of our Golden State: _California, This Golden Land of Promise_, published in 2001, and _Romance of the Bells: The California Missions in Art_ published in 1995.

**Jean Stern, Executive Director**

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**Scenic View Ahead: The Westways Cover Art Program**

The _Westways_ cover art program began in 1928, with the Auto Club commissioning paintings from major artists working in Southern California. These paintings were to be featured on the cover of each monthly issue of its member magazine _Touring Topics_, later to be called the _Westways Magazine_.

Opening on October 11, The Irvine Museum’s exhibition traces prominent styles of art through most of the twentieth century, from paintings representing California Impressionism and Scene Painting to Pop Art and assemblage compositions.

At the opening reception for _Scenic View Ahead_, museum patrons were treated to vintage cars, nostalgic California music as well as festive refreshments. The exhibit was well received as our visitors recognized many of the iconic landscapes that are within reach by automobile.
Art Meets Science

Over the past several years, The Irvine Museum has sponsored *Art Meets Science*, an educational feature that combines art and science in a unique program for elementary school children. During the program, students can view The Irvine Museum’s remarkable paintings to capture a glimpse of California’s former landscape and share in the artist’s reverence for nature.

Following their museum tour, the students travel a short distance to visit The San Joaquin Wildlife Sanctuary (Sea & Sage Audubon) where they can experience the incredible diversity and beauty of this wetland habitat and its inhabitants. While there, they learn to observe nature, recording thoughts and sketches in a personal journal, and creating a group eco-mural to take back to their school.

The Plein Air Project

The Irvine Museum and the Laguna Plein Air Painters Association, or LPAPA, recently teamed up to initiate *Art Squared: The Plein Air Project*, a new, four-part pilot program aimed to further enhance art education for children in our community.

*The Plein Air Project* starts with a LPAPA professional artist visiting a participating elementary school to present an introductory discussion of California Impressionism. This is followed by the artist conducting a live painting demonstration directly in the classroom. The visit to the school is followed by a subsequent field trip to The Irvine Museum where the children can view many of the original paintings introduced to them during the artist’s visit. The finale is the opportunity for each child to create plein air paintings of their own.

Anneliese Elementary, one of our participating schools, created a wonderful short film on their experience with the project that was accepted and featured in last summer’s Newport Beach Film Festival.

The Discovery Cube & The Irvine Museum

Beginning this past summer, The Irvine Museum began a pilot program with Santa Ana’s Discovery Science Center. An extension of our *Art Meets Science* program, we host fieldtrips that start with elementary students visiting our museum. The students then travel to “The Cube” for the remainder of their outing. The science center is devoted to encouraging practices that result in eco-friendly living and promoting environmental stewardship of land, air and sea as well as building partnerships with agencies that share in an environmental mission.

*Dora James, Curator of Education*
Perhaps like no other artist, the plein air painter is mesmerized by natural light. The passion for light drives them to seek the genuine experience and paint it, regardless of climate, weather or natural impediments. Hence, it is as a plein air painter that the landscape painter finds the ultimate reason for being, and at the same time, confronts their most rigorous challenge: to capture quickly the brilliant and fluid visual sensation of natural light at a specific time and place while facing the formidable constraint of fleeting time.

Our summer exhibition, *Then & Now: 100 Years of Plein Air Painting*, featured a selection of the museum’s most notable landscape painters of the past alongside paintings that were painted less than twenty years ago. Now, more than ever, with the increasingly complex qualities that characterize today’s way of life, we need to get back to nature and experience her healing and restorative powers. These artists, of the past and the present, do that in a most admirable way.

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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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