Dear Friend of the Museum,

The year 2012 marks the twentieth anniversary of the founding of The Irvine Museum. The museum was created early in 1992, although we did not actually open our doors to the public until the evening of January 15, 1993.

In the past twenty years, we have mounted over sixty exhibitions here in Irvine. Also, we were the sole organizers and sponsors of thirteen traveling exhibitions, each with its companion book, that have been shown in numerous museums throughout California, and in cities such as Atlanta, Austin, Boca Raton, Charleston, Chicago, Columbus (GA), Jacksonville, Katonah, Memphis, New Britain, New York, Provo, Savannah, Scottsdale, and others throughout the country. We have also collaborated on two major exhibitions with the Laguna Museum of Art, and one each with the Oakland Museum, the Pasadena Museum of California Art, the Georgia Museum of Art, and the Nature Conservancy of California. Moreover, our museum was the first entity to organize and tour an exhibition of California Impressionist art in Europe, with venues in Paris, Krakow, and Madrid.

In June, the museum will open “PARADISE FOUND: Summer in California.” On display will be some of our best examples of California landscape paintings. The exhibition will continue to Thursday, September 20, 2012.

I look forward to seeing you in the museum and invite you to participate with us in all our activities, including some special events we have planned for our twentieth anniversary. I will keep you informed as these plans develop.

—James Irvine Swinden, President

CURRENT EXHIBITION

Paradise Found: Summer in California
June 16 through September 20, 2012

Celebrate summer with a visit to our new exhibition. Paradise Found: Summer in California features a selection of paintings by California Impressionists that show various views of our state as they appeared nearly a century ago, before the great population growth of the late twentieth century.

Starting in the early 1900s, Southern California became a popular destination for impressionist and plein air painters. A French expression, which means “in the open air,” plein air is particularly used to describe the act of painting outdoors. The mild climate in California allowed for numerous opportunities to paint outdoors, and a rich variety of subject matter, ranging from expansive beaches, to snow-capped mountains, to desert, and to rolling hills, was within one day’s travel.

The exhibition includes works by Anna Hills (1882-1930), one of California’s most important painters and teachers. She was one of the founders of the Laguna Beach Art Association and...
served as its president on two occasions. *Summer in the Canyon* displays her facile and quick paint technique, a skill much needed for *plein air* painting.

Painted in 1907 as an advertisement for the Southern Pacific Railway, *Mid-Winter, Coronado Beach* by Louis Betts (1873-1961), shows a group of people frolicking at the beach in the middle of winter. Even then, tourism was important to California’s economy.

Maurice Braun (1877-1941) spent the summer of 1917 painting in Yosemite Park. His *Yosemite Falls from the Valley* captures one of California’s most spectacular sights.

John Frost (1890-1937) suffered from tuberculosis all his life. As such, he often stayed at sanitariums in the warm, dry air of the desert. *Mount San Jacinto* depicts the peak that abuts Palm Springs and that was a favorite painting subject.

Guy Rose (1867-1925) was a native of Southern California. While much of his work was painted in France, *Lifting Fog* shows the coast at Laguna Beach on a typically overcast morning in summer.

*Wash Day, Sunset Beach*, by Sam Hyde Harris (1889-1977), captures the quaint life along numerous coastal communities in the early 1930s. Although Harris worked in downtown Los Angeles, he would take the Pacific Electric Red Line trolley from Sunset Beach and get to work in about thirty minutes.

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**On Landscape Painting**  
*by Jean Stern, Executive Director*

To be a great landscape painter, the artist has to truly love the land. The artist needs to experience the full power and majesty of the land so as to be able to capture these feelings in paint. One cannot “wing it” when it comes to truly magnificent landscapes, the intimacy has to be there, or it simply will not look right. The only way to get that intimacy is to be right there in the landscape, and to be able to paint what one sees and express what one feels.

The concept of painting directly outdoors is called *plein air* painting, an approach that artists have utilized for over one hundred and fifty years. The term “plein-air” comes from the French phrase *en plein-air* which is an idiom that does not translate directly, but simply means “outdoors.” Similarly, in Italian, the phrase is *al fresco*, and in Spanish it’s *al aire libre*.

In restricted circumstances, the custom of working outdoors has been practiced for several hundred years, but it was limited to drawing and watercolor painting, as oil paints were not suited for use outside the studio. Produced in pot-sized batches, oil paints were necessarily restricted to the studio since the only way to prevent them from drying and hardening was to keep them warm, at a constant low simmer.
Artists tried various methods to carry small amounts of prepared paint to the field to sketch outdoors, and numerous attempts were made to carry fresh paint in portable, airtight and waterproof containers. None was effective. The breakthrough came in 1841, when an artist named John Goffe Rand (1801-1873), an American portrait artist living in England, patented the collapsible soft-metal paint tube. This light-weight, airtight container offered artists easy portability and because a part of the tube collapsed with each use, the remaining paint stayed fresh and pliable.

The first painters credited with painting en plein-air in a systematic manner were the artists of the Barbizon School. Originally a small group of Parisian artists of the 1830s, they broke with French tradition by rejecting the pre-set conventions of the Academic manner. By 1848, the Barbizon painters had left Paris for the natural beauty of the Barbizon Forest, where they communed with nature and recorded their experiences by painting en plein air. Charles-François Daubigny (1817-1878), an important member of the group, often gets credit as being the first true plein air painter.

Following upon the footsteps of the Barbizon and with the invention of the paint tube, the French Impressionists became the great popularizers of plein air painting. Impressionist landscapes were distinctive and drew both criticism and praise for their convincing effect of true natural light. In time, Impressionism spread to the United States and by 1900, it became the style of choice among American painters.

Natural light does not stand still, and 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 their 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 natural light.

There are numerous instances of artists battling extreme situations to capture the correct light. On one of his first trips to the Grand Canyon, the great painter and illustrator William Robinson Leigh (1866-1955) misjudged the oppressive heat when he went out to paint. He was forced to stop working when his paints yielded to the heat and rolled down the canvas.

By contrast, on a visit to Quebec in the middle of winter 1908, Alson S. Clark (1876-1949) put on multiple layers of clothing to paint en plein air in Quebec Harbor. He kept warm, but his paints froze on the palette. While most other artists would have packed-up and returned home, Clark, the supreme plein air painter that he was, located a blacksmith who made a small iron box to hold a glowing piece of hot coal affixed to the underside of the palette. Thereafter, his paints stayed warm enough to allow him to continue working.

It is sometimes bewildering to understand the respect accorded by artists for good natural light. The distinguished painter of the Sierra Nevada, Edgar Payne (1883-1947), was set to marry artist Elsie Palmer (1884-1971) on the morning of November 9, 1912. Early that morning, Edgar asked Elsie to contact all their guests and reschedule the wedding for later that afternoon, because, he told her, “…the light was perfect.” Elsie understood the artistic value of perfect light and readily complied.

The long and noble tradition of American landscape painting has continued to our own time. No matter what the location or the climate, the plein air painter aims to capture the true, natural feel of the light that encompasses that landscape. As it has been with plein air painters of the past, artists today endure numerous challenges and difficulties in their determination to get the true effect of fluid, natural light in their paintings. The result is for us the viewers to enjoy, and that, in simple terms, is the monumental beauty of these paintings.

I encourage you to visit our museum to view this wonderful exhibition.
Educational Outreach Programs
by Dora James, Curator of Education

One of the greatest pleasures of being the Curator of Education for The Irvine Museum is getting to see our wonderful paintings through the eyes of visiting school children when they come to the museum on a field trip. They never fail to surprise me with their wonder and enthusiasm for the paintings, and during the tour, they often point out features in our paintings that I may have never noticed before. Learning is a two way street: we teach them and they teach us.

It is always heartwarming to see the children’s point-of-view via our “fan mail” that we get from students after their visit to The Irvine Museum. Here are a few examples of their responses.

clockwise from top left
Maurice Braun Along the Merced River, Private Collection, Courtesy of The Irvine Museum (detail)
4th grade admirer, Study after Along the Merced River
Me on the Right
Museum visit
3rd grade thank you letter
President's Circle | $10,000
Mrs. Joan Irvine Smith
Mr. and Mrs. James Irvine Swinden

Director’s Circle | $5000
Bonhams & Butterfield
First Foundation Bank
Mr. and Mrs. Kurt Krieser

California Patrons | $3000
Ms. Yvonne Boseker

Studio Patrons | $1500
Mr. and Mrs. Peter Adams
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Mr. and Mrs. Rod Daley
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The Museum is open Tuesday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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