

Artists in La Jolla, 1890-1950

by Jean Stern

The small seaside village of La Jolla evolved into an art community in 1894 when Anna Held established her Green Dragon Colony. The Green Dragon was a cluster of cottages designed by Irving Gill (1870-1936), a young architect who, at the time, had been in San Diego just over one year. The colony also served as a center for musicians and artists who came from throughout the United States to entertain both colony residents and Hotel del Coronado visitors. All the while, these creative individuals gathered in kindred energy and exchanged ideas in an atmosphere of friendship and art.

Although none could foresee it, the next significant development in the young but dynamic La Jolla art community came when newspaper heiress Ellen Browning Scripps (1836-1932) retired and settled in La Jolla in 1897. Uncomfortable with her great wealth, she became La Jolla's best loved philanthropist and set about to improve the lives of her new neighbors.

Ellen Browning Scripps was responsible for the creation of the Scripps Institute of Oceanography (1903), The Bishop's School (1909), the La Jolla Women's Club (1914), La Jolla Recreation Center (1913), the Birch Aquarium at Scripps (1915), Scripps Park (1915), Scripps Aviary at the San Diego Zoo (1923), Scripps Memorial Hospital (1924), and Scripps College in Claremont (1926). Upon her death in 1932, she willed the entire collection of nearly 1,200 Albert R. Valentien watercolors of the California flora, which she had personally commissioned from the artist in 1908, to the San Diego Museum of Natural History. In 1941, her home, designed by Irving Gill in 1915, became the La Jolla Art Center, later to be remodeled and renamed the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art.

At the turn of the twentieth century, La Jolla, positioned between two active art communities: Los Angeles to the north, and San Diego to the south, would play host to many of the great California Impressionist painters.

Franz Anton Bischoff (1864-1929) first painted in the San Diego area in 1915 when he participated in the Panama-California Exposition. He continued to paint there, and in La Jolla, all through the mid-1920s, producing a number of paintings of the distinctive coast.

Born in Bohemia, Austria, Bischoff mastered the difficult art of porcelain painting before coming to the United States in 1885. Over the following twenty years, he established himself as the foremost American china painter, a designation he retains to this day. He moved to California in 1906 and settled in South Pasadena.

Once in California, Bischoff turned to landscape painting, finding less and less time to continue his flower paintings and his porcelain work. Through the

Mr. Jean Stern, executive director of the Irvine Museum, is a recognized authority on California impressionism. He frequently lectures on the subject and has written numerous books and articles, including monographs on artists such as Franz A. Bischoff, Alson S. Clark, Sam Hyde Harris and Elsie Palmer Payne.

1920s, he painted the coastal areas of Monterey and Laguna Beach, San Diego, the Sierra Nevada, and the desert near Palm Springs. Some of his most charming works were painted in the small central California village of Cambria. In 1928, he and his friend John Christopher Smith traveled to Utah, where they painted in Zion National Park. He died on February 5, 1929, in his home in South Pasadena, California.

Maurice Braun (1877-1941) was a founding member of the La Jolla Art Association in 1918 and continued to paint and exhibit in La Jolla throughout his life. Born in Hungary, Braun emigrated to the United States with his family when the artist was four years of age. An exceptional talent, he copied works of art at the Metropolitan Museum and, in 1897, enrolled in the School of the National Academy of Design. After three years there, he studied under William Merritt Chase (1849-1916) for an additional year.

In 1909, Braun moved to San Diego. An active member of the Point Loma Theosophical Community, he was given studio space in the Isis Theater building in downtown San Diego by Katherine Tingley. He became an active member of the art community and founded the San Diego Academy of Art in 1910. One of his most important pupils was Alfred R. Mitchell.

In 1921, Braun returned to the East and established a studio in New York City. He also established studios in Connecticut—one at Silvermine and finally in the art colony in Old Lyme. After a few years he returned to San Diego but continued from 1924 to 1929 to spend part of each year in the East. In 1929 he joined nine other artists in forming the Contemporary Artists of San Diego.

Braun enjoyed a national reputation and his paintings were exhibited in Chicago, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and New York. In 1915, he received a Gold Medal at the Panama-California Exposition in San Diego for his painting *California Hills*. Other prizes included the Hallgarten Prize from the National Academy of Design in 1900 and a purchase award from the Witte Memorial Museum in San Antonio, Texas, in 1929. He died November 7, 1941, in San Diego, California.

Alson Skinner Clark (1876-1949), an unconfined traveler, had wandered throughout the world before settling in Pasadena in 1920. Always looking for beautiful scenery, he spent most of his summers through the 1920s vacationing and painting along the coast in Laguna Beach, La Jolla, and San Diego.

Born to a wealthy family in Chicago, Clark enrolled in Saturday classes at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1887 at the age of eleven. He also received private tutoring from a German painter while visiting Europe with his family a few years later. After completing his public school education, he studied at the Art Institute for several months from November 1895 through March 1896. Not satisfied with the teaching methods at the Institute, he left for New York where he enrolled in the newly formed school of William Merritt Chase (1849-1916).

After four years of study, Chase advised Clark to continue his art education in Europe. Late in 1899, Clark went to Paris where he enrolled in the Académie Carmen, the atelier of James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903). He remained there for about six months, during which time he traveled in France, Holland and Belgium. He continued his studies in Paris at the Académie Delecluse and with Alphonse Mucha (1860-1939).

Clark returned to the United States and, early in 1902, opened a studio in Watertown, New York. Newly married, he returned to Paris in the fall of 1902. He

and his wife thereafter divided their time between France and the United States until the outbreak of World War I. Clark exhibited at the Art Institute of Chicago, which held a one-man show for him in January 1906.

On a summer trip in France in 1907, Clark began to lighten his palette to the higher key of his first teacher, Chase. The change in his style to a stronger impressionist method was reinforced during a trip to Spain in 1909 and was regularly seen in his work thereafter. In October and November 1910, he visited Giverny where he saw former classmate Lawton Parker, Frederick Friesseke, and Guy Rose.

An inveterate tourist, Clark traveled throughout Europe and the United States. In 1913, on his way to Paris, he stopped in Panama and decided to undertake the project of recording the construction of the Panama Canal. Eighteen of those paintings were exhibited at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco in 1915.

The Clarks returned to America in August 1914 at the outbreak of World War I. After the United States entered the war in 1917, he enlisted in the Navy and was sent to France to work as an aerial photographer. In the winter of 1919, Clark visited California for reasons of health. In January 1920, he decided to remain, acquiring a home and studio along the Arroyo Seco in Pasadena. He renewed his acquaintance with Guy Rose who had returned to California in 1914. In 1921, along with Rose, Clark began teaching at the Stickney Memorial School of Art. Attracted to the southwest landscape, Clark made numerous painting trips in California and in Mexico. He sent works for exhibition to New York and Chicago, was represented by Stendahl Galleries, and also received mural commissions. He died in Pasadena on March 23, 1949, while painting in his studio.

One of America's great Impressionist painters, **Colin Campbell Cooper** (1856-1937) had come to California to visit the 1915 San Francisco Panama Pacific International Exposition early in the year. He went south to spend the winter of 1915 in Los Angeles and the spring of 1916 in San Diego to paint and attend the Panama-California Exposition. In those few months, he produced a large number of elegant works, from small mixed-media pieces to full-size oil paintings, many of which represented the expositions.

Born in Philadelphia, Cooper attended the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts beginning in 1879. In 1886 he went to Europe, first painting in Holland and Belgium before moving on to Paris. In Paris he studied at the Académie Julian, the Académie Delecluse, and the Académie Viti, three of the more popular art schools among American art students.

After his return to the United States in 1895, Cooper taught watercolor painting for three years at the Drexel Institute in Philadelphia. He returned to Europe in 1898, traveling and painting in Holland, Italy, and Spain, and developing a reputation as a painter of the great architectural treasures of Europe. He continued to be interested in the interpretation of architecture after his return to the United States in 1902, painting a series of impressionist cityscapes of New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago. Over the next several years he continued his European sojourns and in 1913 went to India, returning to California in 1914. In January 1921 Cooper established permanent residency in Santa Barbara. During the 1920s, he served as Dean of the School of Painting at the Santa Barbara School of the Arts. He made another trip to India and visited England, France, and Spain in 1923. He died in Santa Barbara, on November 6, 1937.

Alfred R. Mitchell (1888-1972) left his home in Pennsylvania in 1908 to come to San Diego, California. Wanting to become a professional artist, he began a course of study in 1913 at the San Diego Academy of Art under Maurice Braun. His talents were acknowledged just two years later when he received a Silver Medal at the Panama-California Exposition in San Diego. Encouraged by Braun, Mitchell returned to his native Pennsylvania in 1916 and enrolled in the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts where he came under the powerful artistic influence of two of Bucks County's leading figures, Daniel Garber (1880-1958) and Edward Redfield (1869-1965). In 1920, Mitchell was awarded the highly coveted Cresson European Traveling Scholarship, which allowed him to spend the summer of 1921 in England, France, Italy, and Spain.

Upon completion of his studies, Mitchell returned to San Diego where he became an active member of the art community. He played a leading role in the formative years of both the La Jolla Art Association and, later, the Fine Arts Gallery of San Diego. In 1929, he was a founding member of the Associated Artists of San Diego. Mitchell remained a popular art teacher well into his senior years. He was active in every facet of the San Diego and La Jolla art communities and was widely mourned when he died on November 9, 1972, in San Diego.

Charles Arthur Fries (1854-1940) began his art career at the age of fifteen as an apprentice lithographer in the firm of Gibson and Company in Cincinnati. While there, he began studying under Charles T. Webber (1825-1911) in 1872, at the McMicken School of Design which later became the Cincinnati Art Academy. Fellow students there included future masters John Twachtman (1853-1902), Frank Duveneck (1848-1919), Henry Farny (1847-1916), and Robert Blum (1857-1903).

Fries worked for a few years as an illustrator and staff photographer for the *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*. In 1876 he went to London and Paris where he saw the works of the Impressionists. After returning to the United States, he opened a studio in Cincinnati where he made lithographs from views painted in his journeys in the Southeast which were also published in *Harper's Weekly*, *Century Magazine*, and *Leslie's Magazine*. His lithograph *Bird's Eye View of Cincinnati*, a scene from a hot air balloon, was used for the poster of the Cincinnati Exposition of 1886.

After his marriage in 1887, he moved his studio to New York City where he continued to illustrate for books and magazines, among them *McGuffey's Reader* and Eggleston's *History of the United States*. In 1890 he purchased a farm in Vermont. He met Charles F. Lummis, the great booster of the American Southwest, who advised him to go to California. In 1896, he moved his family west, living at the Mission San Juan Capistrano for several months.

While in Capistrano, Fries' daughter became seriously ill and required the attention of the local doctor. She recovered, but the episode resulted in the most renowned painting of his career. *Too Late*, painted in 1896, depicts a grieving mother prostrate over the recently deceased body of a young girl. A doctor, bag in hand, stands just inside the doorway, apparently unable to arrive in time to save the child. The painting was widely reproduced with copies displayed in numberless pharmacies and doctors' offices throughout the United States. The artist never sold the painting and lent it out for display on numerous occasions during his career. It was eventually purchased by Henry Ward Ranger and is now in the collection of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

After his move to California, Fries put aside illustration work and devoted all

his energy to painting. He was a founding member of the La Jolla Art Association and the Fine Arts Gallery of San Diego. He was an active member of the art community, teaching and painting in Yosemite, Death Valley, Baja California, and the back country of San Diego. He kept a journal record of his paintings that documents nearly seventeen hundred paintings from 1896 to 1940. He was known as the dean of San Diego painters. Charles Fries died on December 15, 1940, in San Diego, California.

Guy Rose (1867-1925) the most respected and distinguished California Impressionist painter visited La Jolla in 1917. Captivated by the beautiful scenery, he painted several majestic views of the beaches and coves.

Born in San Gabriel, Rose attended the California School of Design in San Francisco in 1886 and 1887, studying under Virgil Williams and Emil Carlsen (1853-1932). In 1888, he went to Paris and enrolled in the Académie Julian. Becoming an exceptional student who won every award the school offered, he soon found his paintings accepted for the annual Paris Salon exhibitions.

In 1894 Rose experienced a bout of lead poisoning that forced him to temporarily abandon oil painting. He returned to the United States in the winter of 1895 and moved to New York where he turned to a career as an illustrator as it did not require using oil paints. He also taught drawing and portraiture at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, gradually regaining his health. He took up oil painting again around 1897. In 1899, Rose returned to Paris where he painted landscapes and earned money as an illustrator for *Harper's Bazaar* and other American magazines. He was greatly influenced by Claude Monet and, in 1904, Rose and his wife Ethel settled in Giverny, becoming members of the small American art colony there. He befriended artists Richard Miller (1875-1943), Lawton Parker (1868-1939), and Frederick Frieseke (1874-1939). In 1910, Frieseke, Miller, Parker, and Rose exhibited in New York as "The Giverny Group."

Rose returned permanently to the United States in 1912, settling for a time in New York. He moved to Pasadena at the end of 1914 and served for several years on the board of trustees of the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science, and Art. He became the director of the Stickney Memorial School of Fine Arts in Pasadena and persuaded Richard Miller to visit and teach at the school in 1916. Rose painted primarily in the southern part of the state until about 1918, at which time he began to spend summers in Carmel and Monterey. He developed a serial style of painting, like Monet, in which the same scene would be depicted at different times of day. Arthur Millier, the art critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, expressed great admiration when he remarked that Rose was "almost more a French Impressionist than an American painter."

Rose suffered a debilitating stroke in 1921, rendering him unable to paint for the last years of his life. He died on November 17, 1925, in Pasadena, California.

Cincinnati-born **Albert R. Valentien** (1862-1925) entered the School of Design of the University of Cincinnati (now called the Cincinnati Art Academy) in 1875 at the age of thirteen. He studied under Thomas S. Noble (1835-1907) and Frank Duveneck (1848-1919). His favorite subject was pottery decoration. In 1879, at the age of sixteen, he was competent enough to start a class taught with fellow artist John Rettig (1855-1932).

In 1881, Maria Longworth Nichols offered the young but well-established Valentien the position as chief decorator at her newly founded Rookwood Pottery, in

Cincinnati. He was the first full-time decorator at the venerable firm and remained as chief artist for over twenty years.

At Rookwood, Valentien met his future wife, **Anna Marie Bookprinter** (1862-1947), who was also employed as a decorator starting in late 1884. They were married three years later, on June 1, 1887. The marriage, as well as their artistic collaboration, would prove to be happy, lasting, and productive. Albert's years at Rookwood would establish him as one of the leading American art pottery decorators of his day.

In 1899, the couple took a leave of absence from Rookwood so that Anna might study in Paris. She took sculpture classes under Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) and at the Académie Colarossi. Both Valentiens submitted work for display at the Spring Salon and the prestigious Universal Exposition of 1900. Albert was awarded a Gold Medal for his pottery decoration. His success at the exposition caused his work to be purchased by several European museums, including the Luxembourg Museum in Paris, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and the Museum of Decorative Arts in Budapest.

While in Europe, Albert's health began to fail. In order to relax, he started painting wildflowers. This passion for floral painting would later lead to a second career and much critical acclaim as a painter. In 1900, the couple returned to Cincinnati where Anna tried to get Rookwood to produce a line of pottery that featured more sculptural elements. Her ideas were turned down.

In the spring of 1903, the couple came to San Diego for a short visit with Anna's brother Charles. They immediately fell in love with the beautiful little city and decided to stay there for the rest of the year. While in San Diego, they rediscovered wildflower painting and Albert produced a series of 130 detailed studies of the abundant local flora. This group is now part of the collection of the Cincinnati Art Museum.

Albert and Anna Valentien returned to Cincinnati in 1905. They tendered their resignations from Rookwood and Albert turned to full-time flower painting. In 1908, they again traveled to San Diego. Soon after their arrival, Albert accepted a commission from noted philanthropist Ellen Browning Scripps to paint the entire California flora, which he estimated to be about 1,000 different plants (it is, in fact, more than five times larger). Scripps had a large, private library in La Jolla and she wanted these paintings to be a centerpiece.

In 1911, Albert and his wife Anna opened the Valentien Pottery Company in San Diego. It operated for only a brief time and examples are scarce. Their pottery featured stylized sculptural designs under monochrome vellum glazes, very much like what Anna had unsuccessfully offered to Rookwood. Anna created the etched door hardware and a brass-framed art glass lantern on the outside of the Wednesday Club in San Diego in 1911,

The Scripps commission would occupy nearly ten years of their lives, from 1908 to 1918. Anna collected and Albert painted every specimen of California plants and wildflowers they found. The couple visited all parts of the state, from the Sierra Nevada to the Mojave Desert, including every valley, meadow, desert wash, and coastal plain they could reach in search of their artistic quarry. In many cases, Albert had to look through a microscope to draw the delicate parts of even the smallest plant accurately. It was an achievement unequalled in its scope and artistic merit. Moreover, it was a scientific accomplishment that may never be duplicated since some of these plants are now rare or thought to be extinct. In the end, the series

numbered just under 1,200 paintings, all produced on sheets of light green paper measuring 20 inches by 14 inches. The Valentien paintings of California flora are now in the collection of the San Diego Natural History Museum.

From 1914 to 1916, Anna Valentien taught art at the State Normal School (Teacher's College) in San Diego, and from 1917 to 1938 at San Diego Evening High School. One of her evening school students, Donal Hord (1902-1966), would become San Diego's best known sculptor.

When he finished the Scripps commission, Valentien turned to painting landscapes but worsening health limited his sketching trips. In an interview late in his life, Albert Valentien stated that his only complaint was that "there are so many wonderful things waiting to be done and such little time is given to us in which to do them." Albert died in his home at 3905 Georgia Street, in San Diego, on August 5, 1925. Anna Marie Valentien survived him by more than twenty years and died in San Diego on August 25, 1947, at the age of 85.

The following pages include Plein Air paintings to be featured at The Bishop's School exhibition sponsored by the Irvine Museum January 19 to March 1, 2009.



*Albert R. Valentien
Matilija Poppies,
1903 watercolor and
gouache, 28" x 20"
Private Collection*



Louis Betts (1873-1961), *Mid-Winter, Coronado Beach*, ca. 1907. Oil on canvas, 29" x 24". The Irvine Museum.



Alson S. Clark (1876-1949), Yacht Race, San Diego Bay. Oil on board, 18" x 22". Private Collection, Courtesy of The Irvine Museum



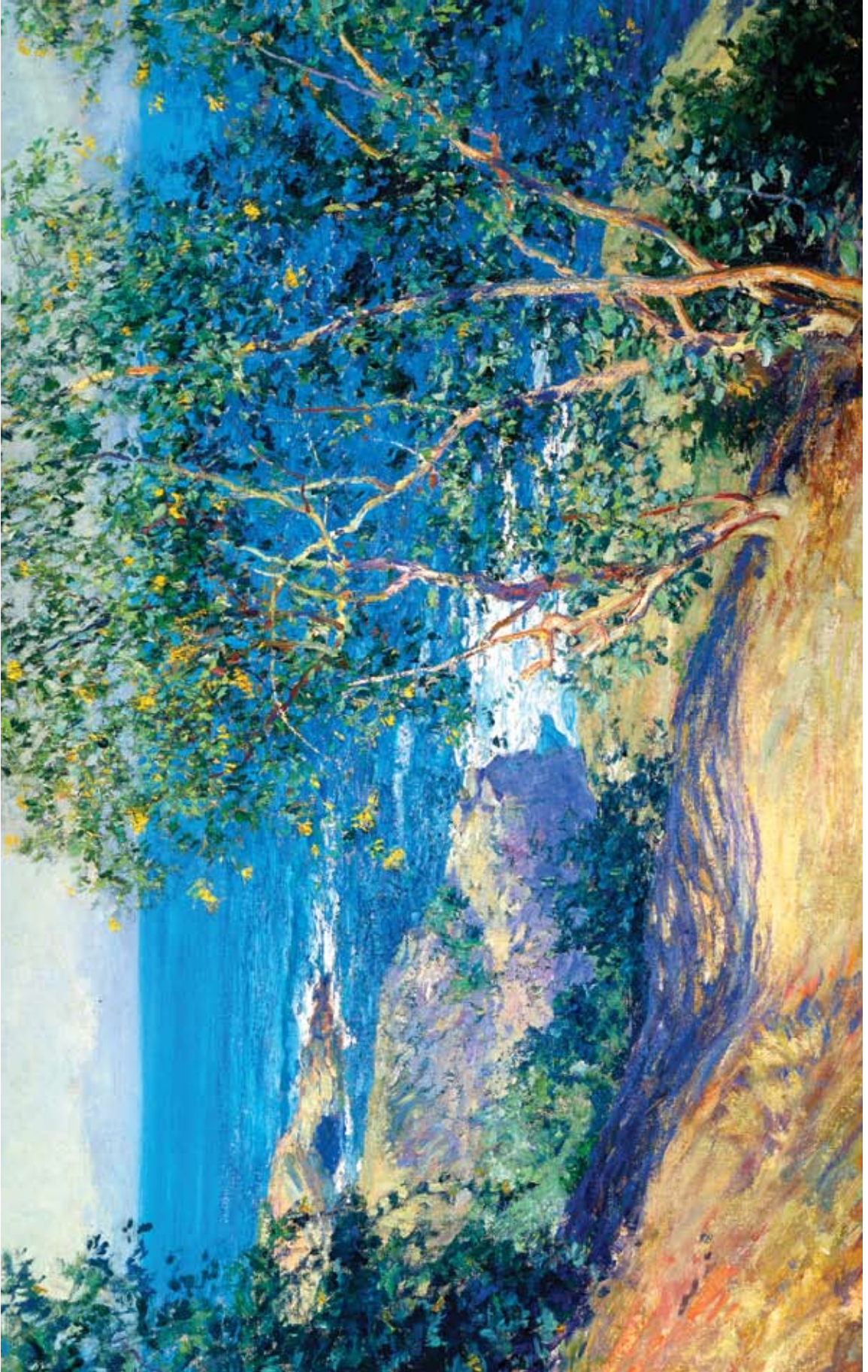
Alson S. Clark (1876-1949), La Jolla, 1924. Oil on board, 18" x 21". Private Collection, Courtesy of The Irvine Museum.



Guy Rose (1867-1925), La Jolla Beach, ca. 1918. Oil on canvas, 24" x 29". Private Collection, Courtesy of The Irvine Museum.



Alson S. Clark (1876-1949), La Jolla Seascape. Oil on board, 35" x 47". This very large painting was painted en plein air. Private Collection, Courtesy of The Irvine Museum.



Guy Rose (1867-1925), *Indian Tobacco Trees, La Jolla, ca. 1918*. Oil on canvas, 24" x 29". Private Collection, Courtesy of The Irvine Museum



Maurice Braun (1877-1941), California Hills, 1914. Oil on canvas, 40" x 50". Winner of the Gold Medal at the 1915 Panama-California Exposition, San Diego. The Irvine Museum.



Maurice Braun (1877-1941), La Jolla, ca. 1918-20. Oil on canvas, 24" x 36". Private Collection.



Colin Campbell Cooper (1856-1937), *Ramona's Marriage Place, San Diego*. Oil on board, 10.5" x 13.25".
This painting shows Old Town, San Diego. Private Collection, Courtesy of The Irvine Museum.



Colin Campbell Cooper (1856-1937), *Balboa Park, San Diego*, 1916. Gouache on board, 6" x 9".
Private Collection, Courtesy of The Irvine Museum.

Alfred R. Mitchell (1888-1972), *La Jolla Shores*. Oil on canvas, 40" x 50" (unsigned). Courtesy of The Irvine Museum

