Creating Earth Portraiture

The Museum’s next special exhibition, opening on September 6, will focus on the Northern California landscape paintings of Ray Stanford Strong (1905–2006), an outstanding 20th century artist, who documented and interpreted California’s natural and rural beauty. The Sunletter asked guest curators Mark Humpal and Karen Holmes to provide some background and insight on the show. Mark is the owner and proprietor of Mark Humpal Fine Art, a private gallery in Portland, Oregon, and Karen is well known to many of you as a former curator and registrar of the Grace Hudson Museum, as well as our former Carpenter-Hudson Family Historian. The two previously worked together, curating the Museum’s 2018/19 exhibition, Artful Liaisons.

Mark: In 2018, while performing my guest curatorial assignments for Artful Liaisons, I received exciting news that my book, Ray Stanford Strong: West Coast Landscape Painter, had won a gold medal at the Independent Publisher Book Awards. I felt gratified when the Museum ordered copies for its gift shop. Little did I know at the time that seeds for a future exhibition had been planted and would come to fruition six years later—Museum director David Burton perused my book and found it intriguing that Strong favored Northern California for subject matter in his landscape paintings. When he asked me to consider curating a retrospective highlighting these works, I emphatically said YES! That the Grace Hudson Museum is geographically situated smack dab in the middle of Strong’s happiest painting grounds made it the ideal venue. And so, Earth Portraiture: Ray Strong’s Northern California Landscapes is now a reality.

Viewers will encounter fifty works ranging from miniatures to murals, demonstrating Strong’s ability to successfully manage scale over a wide range. Newly surfaced murals, unavailable at the time of my book’s publication, include a pair painted for Lassen National Park in the late 1930s and another pair (continued on page 5)
Gala, Gift Shop, and Help Needed

Save the Date! The 2024 annual Gala to benefit the Grace Hudson Museum will be on Saturday, September 21. This year we’re changing things up a bit. We have secured the Ukiah Valley Conference Center for the event, which frees us from concerns about our unpredictable weather. And, more importantly, we will be honoring Karen and John Moon, who have been among the Museum’s most dedicated supporters and volunteers. Over the years and at different times, both have served as board members of the Sun House Guild. John also had a distinguished tenure as a member of the Endowment Fund board and was deeply involved in a number of Sun House and Museum capital projects. The evening will feature a cocktail hour with hors d’oeuvres, sit-down dinner, music, and an array of auction items. Keep an eye on the Museum’s website and social media for details as plans move forward.

Here in the Gift Shop we’re preparing for a festive fall and winter holiday season. New items from around the county and around the globe are appearing weekly. Our children’s book department has been steadily growing, and there are so many new chapter and picture books, as well as non-fiction titles for kids and teens, with a focus on Indigenous authors. We also feature activities...
for kids to encourage creativity and enjoyment of the outdoors. Wool felting, rock painting, nature-themed coloring and sticker books, and origami kits have been favorites of Museum visitors.

In our general book department we are always adding new titles in the areas of North American Indigenous history and culture, as well as fiction and poetry by Indigenous authors. As always, we offer a selection of original art, jewelry, and decorative items by local artists and artisans, for year-round gift giving. Stop in to see what’s new. The Gift Shop is open during regular museum hours.

Finally, the Museum is greatly in need of volunteers. We depend on volunteers in every area, from Gift Shop assistant to Sun House docent to Wild Gardens maintenance. Over the past year, it has not been uncommon that on any given day we have no one on site to give tours of the Sun House, or that we’ve had to close the Gift Shop for lack of staffing. We have been learning that volunteerism throughout the United States has dropped significantly since the onset of COVID-19 in 2020. That’s understandable. As a result, however, it’s taken a toll on our ability to give our visitors the best experience possible. If you are unable to be a volunteer, please let others know of our need. Shayne and Vanessa, our Visitor Services staff at the front desk, will be happy at any time to discuss our current opportunities. Thank you for helping us get the word out!

— Toni Wheeler,
Sun House Guild President

The Grace Hudson Museum Endowment Fund exists to provide long-term financial stability for the Museum and Sun House. The Endowment welcomes contributions of cash, stock, and real estate, through direct gifts or via planned giving. Heartfelt thanks to these recent donors!

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Endowment Gifts

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The Quail Baby Comes Home

Around the middle of April this year, I received a phone call from Dennis Calabi, the owner of Calabi Gallery in downtown Santa Rosa. Dennis is a long-time friend of the Grace Hudson Museum. Not only is he an authority on early California paintings (Grace Hudson’s time period) but he is also a professional conservator and, over the years, has done a number of conservation treatments on paintings in our collections. Dennis had taken on consignment Grace’s numbered oil 650, The Quail Baby from 1930, and was curious if I knew of any Grace collectors who might be interested in purchasing it. The owner of the painting had given him a few weeks to find a buyer and, if Dennis was unsuccessful, would take back possession of the painting to consider other options.

While we chatted on the phone, I hastily looked through The Painter Lady—the de facto bible and catalogue raisonné of Grace Hudson’s life and her numbered oils—authored by Dr. Searles “Sy” Boynton in 1978. I quickly found the thumbnail image of The Quail Baby and determined that I should go take a look at it in person.

Before heading to Calabi Gallery, I did a bit of research. Grace created at least four other paintings in which “quail” are explicitly depicted and/or referenced; two seemed very relevant to the painting Dennis was brokering. The first and most notable is numbered oil 4 from 1892, titled Interrupted Bath, also known as Quail Baby. Another is numbered oil 510 from 1918 titled A Daughter of the Quail Woman. Both have been in the collections of the Monterey Museum of Art for many years, and I verified that they still are.

In the Museum’s painting files, I found a typed note for the 1930 Quail Baby referencing what reads as a Lake County Pomo origin story. In it, Quail Woman, out of concern for the future and happiness of her quail children, took them to Ba-gil, the witch woman of Clear Lake. In her cave, located above the taboo line on Mt. Konocti, Ba-gil taught the children in the ways of humans and also of the mysteries of basket weaving. The note includes the quote, “This was all done as our ancestors told us.” Whether the story and quote were told to Grace, or came from John Hudson’s notebooks, or through Sy Boynton’s independent research is not fully known yet. However, here, I thought, was a story, that we were currently unable to tell in the Museum’s Grace Hudson gallery. I felt it also spoke to Grace’s interest throughout her painting life of recording aspects of Pomo culture.

Seeing The Quail Baby at Dennis’s gallery, I was immediately struck by its beauty and by Grace’s superb technique. Dennis eagerly showed me documentation on the back of the frame authenticating that the painting had been a part of the inaugural exhibition of the newly opened Grace Hudson Museum in 1986. At that time, the painting was not owned by Dennis Calabi’s consigner. The price at which it was being offered seemed fair to me and within our reach. I left with the hope and expectation that we would buy it. And, with the quick approval of our Endowment Fund board, we purchased it with money from the Museum’s Acquisitions Fund.

There is much more to research and be known about this painting, including what the (continued on next page)
files of the companion paintings at the Monterey Museum of Art might have to offer. For now, I’ll close by mentioning that our *Quail Baby* was accompanied with evidence of provenance—meaning where the painting previously had been and under whose ownership. There is a copy of a money order for $1,000 for the painting’s purchase, made out in 1959 to Mark and Melissa Carpenter—Grace’s nephew and niece-in-law who had inherited and were living in the Sun House. The buyer was Dorothy Horr, who we believe was the spouse of Athol Horr, a deputy sheriff of Mendocino County living in Ukiah. One thousand dollars in 1959 would roughly be the equivalent of $11,000 today. The loan form from the 1986 exhibition, as well as the tag on the back of the frame, indicates that the painting was at that time owned by Mrs. Roberta Lupton.

—David Burton, Director

Recent Contributions

Kat Beau * Elizabeth Crook * Gudrun Dye, * in memory of Pat Denny and Joan Schlienger * Arlene Hartin * Katarzyna Rolzinski, * for Exhibitions & Programs * Jim Ronco & Francis Harriman * Valerie O’Riordan * Cristina Simpson, * in memory of Jack Ostler * Kathleen Spitzer * Susan Stern & Patrick Hickey * Kelly Thorn

Creating Earth Portraiture (continued from Page 1)


Strong family members, private collectors, and institutions are graciously lending superb examples of Ray’s work for the exhibition. Of note is a painting of Black Mountain in West Marin County titled *Indian Summer*. It is unquestionably his most iconic piece, and a subject he returned to through many seasons and over many decades. During my interviews with Ray for my book, he often remarked that the softly rounded contours of California’s golden grass-covered hills, such as Black Mountain, struck him as “reclining nudes everywhere!” Starting in 1950, he discovered scenes to his liking in Mendocino County, many of which will be on view in this first ever exhibition centering on his Northern California landscapes.

While the focus is on Strong’s Northern California works, scenes painted in Oregon, New York, Arizona, Utah, and Europe will be included, providing touchstones for meaningful events in the artist’s career and life. It is my hope that, through Ray Strong’s paintings and life story, visitors to *Earth Portraiture* discover the warm, outgoing, and inspiring artist I got to know over the last two years of his life.

Karen: When I was Curator of Collections and Exhibits at the Grace Hudson Museum, I had the pleasure of working with Mark on *Artful Liaisons*, in which we connected the lives of young Grace Carpenter (prior to marrying John Hudson), her art school beau Edward Espey, and his friend Grafton Tyler Brown. These latter two artists spent significant time during their careers not only in California, but in Oregon—Mark’s area of artistic expertise. When David Burton approached Mark about an exhibition on Ray Strong, another important Oregon artist with California ties, I offered to assist.

Ray Strong considered himself a portrait painter of the land. Grace Hudson, namesake of the Grace Hudson Museum, was also a portrait painter, known and regarded for her sensitive portrayals of the local Pomo Indian peoples. However, she too enjoyed the landscape genre. She produced numerous *plein air* sketches, often incorporating them into the backgrounds of her better-known Pomo portraiture. To complement the Strong exhibit, we will be adding to it a small companion display of Grace Hudson’s landscapes. We hope you will enjoy comparing Strong’s and Hudson’s tributes to beautiful Mendocino County.
This issue of the Sunletter brought to you through the generosity of:

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Special Thanks for Collections Gifts

Received since January 2024

Bill Brazil, for the donation of ten Pomo baskets from the collection of Dorothy Byrnes Leonard (1894–1974).

Born in Mendocino, Dorothy spent the majority of her life in the area. She was a well-respected teacher and the collection includes gifts from her Native American students, along with baskets she purchased.

Pending further research, some of the baskets have been provisionally attributed to Annie Burke, Lucy Cooper, and William or Mary Knight Benson.

Right: a selection of Pomo baskets from Bill Brazil’s gift.