Rhythm & Abstraction
IMCA’s current exhibition, *The Resonant Surface: Movement, Image, and Sound in California Painting*, examines the sensory experience in painting via four thematic sections. In the second section on rhythm and abstraction, curator Erin Stout considers how line, shape, and color activate physical sensations of movement and touch. Grounded in scientific theories on how colors optically interact, techniques like Pointillism (the use of individual dots of unmixed paint to form an image) and Divisionism (which uses dashes of paint) rely on the viewer’s eye and mind to blend colors in real time. Long after falling out of fashion in Europe in the late 19th century, California painters continued to experiment with these methods championed by French Impressionism and its offspring, Neo-Impressionism.
Ernest Bruce Nelson (1888 – 1971) was a native Californian who initially studied engineering and architecture at Stanford University before transferring to the art department. After traveling to New York for additional art training, he returned to the Santa Clara Valley in 1912. The following year he graduated with a degree in graphic arts from Stanford and established a studio in Pacific Grove on the Monterey Peninsula. Soon after, Nelson presented his work in two exhibitions at Stanford and another at Helgesen & Marshall Gallery in San Francisco. By 1914, he was also exhibiting at the Del Monte Gallery in Monterey and in 1915 won a Silver Medal at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition for *The Summer Sea* (pictured above) which reveals Nelson's technical and artistic prowess. The rhythm of the lively, vertical brushstrokes depicting the grassy coastline and rock outcroppings contrasts with the steady, horizontal dashes of the calm, blue ocean. One can almost hear the breeze rustling through the coastal grasses, smell the salty spray, and feel the sun's warmth from this vantage overlooking the coastline.

In 1916, an entire gallery was devoted to 30 of Nelson's paintings at the inauguration of the Oakland Art Gallery (William H. Gerdts, *Masters of Light: Plein-Air Painting in California 1890 – 1930*). He continued to paint and exhibit his work until early 1918 when he enlisted in the Army Air Service and moved to Columbus, OH. Following his service, he settled in New York state where he spent the rest of his life and career.

**Film Screening: Dudley Murphy**

Dudley Murphy (1897 – 1968) was an American film director known for his experimental work in early 20th century cinema. He lived and worked for much of his life in Southern California.

Murphy pioneered techniques in combining movement, image, and sound in the silent film era with his Visual Symphonies, including *Soul of the Cypress* (1920), the first American avant-garde
film screened in New York, and *Danse Macabre* (1922), a short dance film conceived by dancer Adolph Bolm. Murphy’s most well-known film, *Le Ballet Mécanique*, was a groundbreaking Surrealist collaboration with Fernand Léger and Man Ray.

IMCA is pleased to make these three films available on its Vimeo channel from October 22 through October 31, 2021. Visit the website for more information. *Soul of the Cypress* is also on view in the exhibition.

Staff Pick
I love how the decorative arts bring aesthetic beauty into the home environment for the simple pleasure of looking and to create a sense of place. This porcelain vase by “Impressionist china painter” Franz A. Bischoff (1864 – 1929), as he was known by his late 19th-/early 20th-century contemporaries, is rich in style and color. The elegance of its elongated, moss green shape draws
the eye to the shoulder clustered with fat, yellow poppies resting on slender stems swaying towards the base. There is an Arts and Crafts simplicity and symmetry to *California Poppies* that reveals Bischoff’s technical mastery of illustration and composition, which he learned as an apprentice in his native Bohemia.

After emigrating to the United States in 1882 and later settling in the Los Angeles area with his family in 1906, the artist joined the California Art Club, where he expanded his practice to watercolors and oil paintings on canvas. He also explored a Post-Impressionist style that used color liberally, perhaps inspired by his new friends and surroundings. During the gray days of winter, I imagine this vase prominently positioned on a fireplace mantle, inserting the warm California sun into a chilly living room and signaling the promise of summer.

Anne Bergeron
Interim Deputy Director, IMCA

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**Featured Work: Country Road**

William Henry Clapp was born in Montreal, Canada to American parents on October 29, 1879. At age six, he moved to California with his family and settled in Oakland where he spent his childhood. In 1900, he returned to Montreal and studied for four years with William Brymner followed by further training in Paris at the Academies Julian, Colarossi, and Grande Chaumiere. After multiple stints traveling, teaching, and painting in Europe, New York, and Cuba, Clapp
returned to the Bay Area and in 1918 was appointed director and curator of the Oakland Art
Gallery. Clapp retired from his position at Oakland Art Gallery in 1952 and died on April 21, 1954.

Clapp may be best known as a member of the Society of Six—a group of *plein air* painters
including August Gay, Selden Connor Gile (*Radio*, circa 1928, pictured below), Maurice Logan,
Louis Siegriest, and Bernard von Eichman—who worked in Northern California in the 1910s and
1920s. In 1923, Clapp organized the first of six annual Society of Six exhibitions at the Oakland
Art Gallery. He also created the group’s manifesto (see entry below). Nancy Boas wrote about
these artists in her book, *The Society of Six: California Colorists* (1997): “They were a group of
hearty, frank individuals whose rough-hewn quality also characterized their work, both in their
choice of earthy, unpretentious subject matter and in their spontaneous, vigorous application of
paint. They were undervalued in their day by the genteel art establishment of the San Francisco
Bay Area and forgotten for many years when abstraction eclipsed earlier styles. Yet today their
painting stands as some of the most modern and lasting produced in the West at that time. . . .
The Six’s boldness, unfettered exploration, chance taking, and crudeness, disdained at the time,
foretold the new directions that California art would take a generation later. These unruly outsiders
on the margin of their local art establishment had found a way to join the vital kernel of
Impressionism to California’s landscape tradition.”

As described by IMCA curator Erin Stout, *Country Road* (pictured above) “lays bare Clapp’s
analytical mode of deconstructing and reconstructing the scene as patches of chromatic light,
and, in doing so, engages the viewer in this same process. Thus, one might say that the subject
of *Country Road* is not only the depicted landscape but also the near-abstract way in which Clapp
has rendered the landscape.”
Society of Six Manifesto

We Believe

All great art is founded upon the use of visual abstractions to express beauty.

These abstractions are: Vision, light, color, space (third dimensional form), atmosphere (air), vibration (life, movement), form (length and breadth and form of accidents such as persons, trees, etc.)

Pattern is the means by which the abstractions are arranged and united in such a way as to procure the esthetic end. And by pattern we mean unity, contrast, harmony, variety, symmetry, rhythm, radiation, interchange, line, tone, etc.

Form, i.e., objects, is accidental and transitory, except in its large tense—space. That the object we see happens to be a man instead of a tree or other object is an accident, since if we look a few feet to one side we see an entirely different object. Form is also destroyed and distorted by light, color, vision, and space—in other words, its visual existence is by grace of larger abstractions. We choose the grater rather than the lesser, inasmuch as painting is interpretation rather than representation, and it is only by sacrifice of the lesser that we can express the greater with most force.

To us, seeing is the greatest joy of existence, and we try to express that joy. Hence the cheer and happiness of the present exhibition.

We do not believe that painting is a language. Nor do we try to "say" things, be we do try to fix upon canvas the joy of vision. To express, to show— not to write hieroglyphics. We have no concern with stories, with laps of time, nor with the probability or improbability of a hereafter. In other words, we are not trying to illustrate a thought or write a catalogue, but to produce a joy through the use of the eyes.
We have much to express, but nothing to say.  
We have felt, and desire that others may also feel.


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Performance: VocaLotus A Cappella
The new UCI student a cappella group VocaLotus performs a special vocal arrangement of “Overture” by New York indie-pop band AJR—a dynamic and textural compilation of the songs featured on their album The Click. This prerecorded audiovisual performance explores the interrelationship of sound and vision and offers a multisensory interpretation of the artwork and themes in The Resonant Surface: Movement, Image, and Sound in California Painting.

VocaLotus is a close-knit community that supports the growth of members as individuals and as a competitive a cappella group by learning, performing, and networking together through music. VocaLotus originated as a small choir for the Vietnamese Student Association and following the graduation of the founding members became a year-round inclusive campus organization during the 2020 – 2021 academic year. Their committed and multi-talented members perform, arrange, record, mix, and direct their virtual performances. The mission of the group is to bring together singers of diverse backgrounds who are passionate about the arts and provide a collaborative environment where people can learn from one another personally and professionally.

“Overture” by VocaLotus is available October 10, 2021 – February 19, 2022 on IMCA’s Vimeo channel.

Follow VocaLotus on Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook.
Recommended Reading Guide and Spotify Playlist

The Recommended Reading Guide is a curated list of publications related to the artists, works, ideas, and themes in *The Resonant Surface: Movement, Image, and Sound in California Painting*. The guide is available for download on the website and in print at IMCA's interim museum location. These publications are held in IMCA's browsing collection and available to peruse onsite during in-person visits to the exhibition.

For those who are interested in activating multiple senses during their visit, IMCA has created a Spotify playlist for the exhibition. Listen to the playlist on your personal device (with headphones) during your visit.

Upcoming Public Programs

**Una Charla Sobre Arte / A Chat About Art**
October 7 and 28, 3 – 4 pm PT
Free, drop-in, and open to the public.
7 y 28 de octubre, 3 a 4 p.m.
Libre y abierto al público. No se requiere registro previo.

**Virtual Workshop: Free the Voice with Odeya Nini**
October 8, 12 – 1 pm PT
Free and open to the public. Advance registration required.

**Gallery Talk: Kylie Ching and Scott Volz**
October 22, 12 – 1 pm PT
Free, drop-in, and open to the public.

**Virtual Workshop: Voice Talk with Odeya Nini**
November 5, 12 – 1 pm PT
Free and open to the public. Advance registration required.

Image credits

Ernest Bruce Nelson, *The Summer Sea*, completed by 1915, Oil on canvas, 30 x 40 in. UC Irvine Institute and Museum of California Art, Gift of The Irvine Museum

Still from *Soul of the Cypress* by Dudley Murphy (1897-1968), 1920, tinted black & white, 35mm transferred to HD video, 9 minutes, 28 seconds. Originally a silent film, music was added for New York release in 1921. Music by Claude Debussy “Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun” (1894). Courtesy of Light Cone (Paris, France) and the rights-holder.
William Henry Clapp, *Country Road*, 1943, Oil on canvas, 30 x 36 in. UC Irvine Institute and Museum of California Art, Gift of The Irvine Museum

Selden Connor Gile, *Radio*, circa 1928, Oil on canvas, 30 x 36 in. The Buck Collection at UCI Institute and Museum of California Art

Photo of Browsing Collection by Julie Delliquanti.

Franz A. Bischoff, *California Poppies*, after 1890, Porcelain, 14 x 6 in. UC Irvine Institute and Museum of California Art, Gift of The Irvine Museum


Photo of gallery talk by Robert Plogman.

IMCA's ongoing collections research continues to provide new information, which will result in updates, revisions, and enhancements to object records. At the time of publication image credits are reviewed by IMCA's curatorial staff and reflect the most current information the museum has in its database but may be incomplete.