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# Radiant Impressions

**UCI** IMCA

Institute and Museum of California Art



## Note to Teachers

UCI Institute and Museum of California Art (IMCA) aims to be a resource to educators and students by offering school visits, programs, digital tools, and activities designed for grades 3–12 that contribute to the development of stronger critical-thinking skills, empathy, and curiosity about art and culture. When students are encouraged to express themselves and take risks in discussing and creating art, they awaken their imaginations and nurture their creative and innovative potential. School visits offer opportunities for students to develop observation and interpretation skills using visual and sensory information, build knowledge independently and with one another, and cultivate an interest in artistic production.

This Teacher Resource Guide includes essays, artist biographies, strategies for interdisciplinary curriculum integration, discussion questions, methods for teaching with objects, a vocabulary list, and activities for three works in IMCA's collection that are included in the exhibition *Radiant Impressions*.

## About the Exhibition

From California Impressionism to the Light and Space movement, California artists have been celebrated for their skillful rendering of the perceptual effects of light. Focusing on painters working in California throughout the 20th century, *Radiant Impressions* considers the ways these artists have engaged with light not only for its optical qualities but also for its power to infuse ephemeral moments with meaning and emotion. Whether the warm golden tones of the California sun or the intense glow of electric bulbs, light in these paintings communicates a sense of anticipation, celebration, rest, and reflection.

Presenting works organized in thematic groupings—The Domestic Realm and Work, Capturing the Scene, Play and the Social Sphere, and Lighting the Portrait—the exhibition brings together a diverse selection of landscapes and portraiture as well as genre scenes depicting people at work and at play.

## Featured Works

Guy Rose, *Laguna Eucalyptus*, circa 1917, Oil on canvas, 40 x 30 in. The Irvine Museum Collection at the University of California, Irvine

Emil J. Kosa Jr., *Freeway Beginning*, circa 1948, Watercolor on heavy wove paper, 22 x 30 in. The Buck Collection at the UCI Institute and Museum of California Art

Louis Betts, *Mid-Winter, Coronado Beach*, circa 1907, Oil on canvas, 29 x 24 in. The Irvine Museum Collection at the University of California, Irvine

## Learn More

For questions about scheduling a school visit, please contact the Education Department by email or phone at [imca@uci.edu](mailto:imca@uci.edu) or 949-476-0294 or register online at [imca.uci.edu](http://imca.uci.edu).

# About the Artwork



Guy Rose, *Laguna Eucalyptus*, circa 1917,  
Oil on canvas, 40 x 30 in. The Irvine Museum Collection at the UCI Institute and  
Museum of California Art

## About the Artwork

With its emphasis on light and shadow, Guy Rose (1867–1925) was clearly influenced by **Impressionism** when painting *Laguna Eucalyptus* (1917). A native of California who studied and painted in the state, Rose had direct experience with European Impressionism. He lived in Giverny, France where he came to know Claude Monet (1840–1926). This is one of the signature paintings the artist made on his many visits to Laguna Beach from 1916 to 1918. Like Monet, Rose often painted a series of pictures of the same setting. In this case, he started with a small *en plein air* sketch, painted while outdoors, and then made two more paintings of the same subject.<sup>1</sup> Here, the famous, non-native eucalyptus takes the spotlight, windswept on a hill in Southern California. The trees' distinctive, stylized trunks and branches bend and sway, while their leafy canopies echo the fluffy cumulus clouds they seem close to touching. Rose has presented them in portrait orientation—instead of the traditional landscape view—suggesting **anthropomorphization**.

Laguna Eucalyptus

The subject of Rose’s painting was such a popular one that a critic at the time even coined a term using the genus name: “Eucalyptus School.” The phrase describes landscape painters in Southern California from about 1915 to 1930 who painted “with attractive, acceptable coloration and loose brushwork,” writes curator Nancy Dustin Wall Moure. But the designation also came with a “negative connotation,” she continues; these artists were criticized as decorative.<sup>2</sup> Moure contends that the “Eucalyptus School” was “a definite offspring of Impressionism, but probably did not adhere to enough of French Impressionism’s original tenets to deserve to be called Southern California Impressionism.” Still, she writes, the term “‘impressionistic’... meaning a colorful, light-filled rendering of landscape” could apply.<sup>3</sup>

So how did the eucalyptus tree become such an iconic subject for so many California artists? The Homestead and Timber Culture Acts of 1862 and 1873, respectively, are a big part of the answer. These acts offered land ownership to European American settlers in exchange for them moving west, building homes, and planting crops and trees. Under the Homestead Act, 1.5 million white families gained ownership of 246 million acres of Indigenous lands. Taken together, these acts created a long legacy of property ownership and economic mobility that excluded Black, Indigenous, and other nonwhite people.<sup>4</sup> They also created lasting changes to the environment.

White settlers perceived the land they were occupying as unhealthy and thought the best way to reduce disease was through the introduction of European American agricultural practices. They believed specific plants

**Settlers thought the eucalyptus tree’s aroma could prevent disease and make areas such as swamps healthier by absorbing water and protecting soil.**

had advantages. Eucalyptus trees had already been imported by colonists to Algeria, southern Africa, and Cuba. Settlers thought the tree’s aroma could prevent disease and that it could make areas such as swamps healthier by absorbing water and protecting soil. Doctors and other marketers recommended planting eucalyptus

trees in the Central Valley. By 1874, according to Linda Nash, professor at the University of Washington, Californians had planted almost a million of them.<sup>5</sup> The trees thrived in Southern California’s climate. Indeed, the main street of Laguna Beach’s business district was planted so heavily with eucalyptus that it became known as Forest Avenue.<sup>6</sup> But many of the purported special properties of the eucalyptus—as lumber for building and as medicine for healing—would eventually be debunked. Railroads built with eucalyptus were more prone to rotting and cracking, and the hoped-for medicinal benefits—as treatment for respiratory ailments, for instance—were never verified by science.<sup>7</sup> While the tree did not turn out to be what the marketers and boosters claimed, it was a key subject for California’s artists, perhaps more than any other tree in the state’s history.



Guy Rose at the San Francisco School of Design, 1887

## About the Artist

Guy Rose (1867–1925) was a key part of an important shift in California Art from an academic 19th-century artistic style to an Impressionistic style. Born in San Gabriel, CA into a wealthy family, Rose grew up on his family’s ranch known as Sunny Slope. As a nine-year-old child in 1876, Rose was accidentally shot in the face during a hunting trip with his brothers. During his recovery, he learned to sketch and paint.<sup>8</sup>

Ten years later, Rose traveled to San Francisco to study at the California School of Design. There, in 1886 and 1887, he took classes with Emil Carlsen (1853–1932), an Impressionist painter who had emigrated from Denmark, and Virgil Williams (1830–1886), an American landscape and portrait painter. In 1888, he studied abroad in Paris where he enrolled at the Académie Julian, a private art school that was a fertile ground for artists from around the world.

In 1904, Rose and his wife Ethel settled in Giverny and became members of the vibrant artist colony there. Between 1885 and 1915, the previously sleepy village attracted more than 350 artists from at least 18 countries. They wanted to be in the presence of the master Impressionist painter Claude Monet (1840–1926), who settled there in 1883, but they also wanted to practice *en plein air* painting, enjoy the beauty of the environment, and be close to cosmopolitan Paris. Perhaps most importantly, they wanted to socialize with other artists. By 1900, Giverny was an artistic center with garden parties, tennis games, and artist-owned homes.<sup>9</sup> Although Rose did not paint with Monet, they were friends and often socialized together. This era of artistic camaraderie came to an end with the beginning of World War I.

Like other American artists in Giverny, Rose never abandoned the underlying structure of traditional painting, but did experiment with innovative methods of using light, color, and brushwork. In the early years, Rose drew the surrounding landscape of fields, hills, and streams and tried painting without first drawing an outline. He also experimented with painting on-site rather than in the studio. He took longer to incorpo-

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# About the Artist

# Guy Rose

## About the Artist

rate more radical methods. It was not until 1900 that he began to paint with unblended strokes of color, a signature technique of Impressionism.<sup>10</sup> But Rose's style was uniquely his own. A critic at the time wrote, "Rose is a direct, artistic descendent of Monet, but he is a man of today, and he is therefore more personal in his point of view. In him, Monet's passion for paint has been metamorphosed by time and spirit into a poetic feeling for nature, a more fastidious faculty of selection."<sup>11</sup> Rose returned permanently to the United States in 1912. Two years later, he settled in Pasadena, in part due to bouts of lead poisoning from the paints he used.<sup>12</sup> Back home, he embraced the local landscape and painted primarily in the southern part of the state until about 1917. The following year, Rose visited Carmel, another artist community that had attracted East Coast artists such as Childe Hassam (1859–1935) and William Merritt Chase (1849–1916), as well as artists who relocated after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. Rose was taken by Carmel's unique environment and rugged coastline and soon after settled there, beginning a productive period of landscape painting.<sup>13</sup>

In 1921, Rose suffered a stroke that left him partially paralyzed and unable to paint. He died in 1925.<sup>14</sup>

# View and Discuss

## View And Discuss

Ask students what they notice about this painting.

What choices did the artist, Guy Rose, make in how he presented the landscape? How did he orient the canvas? What point of view did he paint from? How did he show light and shadow?

Find a photograph of eucalyptus trees and compare this painting to the photograph. What is similar and different? What has Rose experimented with in terms of how he depicted the trees?

One critic of the time said Rose had a “poetic feeling for nature.”<sup>15</sup> What do students think he meant by that? Ask them to use evidence from the painting to support their point of view.

Rose first sketched the scene *en plein air*, which means to paint outdoors. Rose was friends with Claude Monet, an avid *en plein air* painter, and helped bring these ideas to the United States. Ask students what they think the benefits might be of painting *en plein air*? What might the challenges be? Would students like to paint *en plein air*? Why or why not?

Eucalyptus trees are not native to California and were planted in great numbers by European American settlers claiming land through the Homestead and Timber Culture Acts. As a class, discuss these acts and their legacy of racially exclusive property ownership. As scholar Linda Nash notes, white settlers believed the best way to create healthy environments was to introduce European American agricultural practices. Ask students how the introduction of non-native trees like the eucalyptus could have affected the environment and Indigenous communities.

# Activities

## Activities

### The Impact of Westward Expansion on the Environment

In many ways, the eucalyptus tree is a symbol of westward expansion and the colonization of Indigenous lands by white settlers. As settlers moved west, claiming Indigenous lands through the Homestead and Timber Culture Acts, they also changed the environment with non-native tree species, believing that these species would create more healthful spaces. Ask students to identify an element of their local environment that has been altered through population changes and settlement. Challenge them to “show” their research through two landscape paintings: one before and one after.

### The Great Eucalyptus Debate

The eucalyptus tree was planted by white settlers in great numbers after the Civil War and was believed to have special properties, including eliminating disease; it was often used for lumber and medicine. Many of these beliefs have since been debunked, but even today, the tree is the subject of great debate. Some environmentalists believe that non-native species, like the eucalyptus, should be removed from the ecosystem. Other environmentalists believe there is no way to return to a completely native ecosystem and that the removal of eucalyptus trees has drawbacks, including the use of chemicals to fully remove them.<sup>16</sup>

Assign students to learn more about this issue and then stage a debate in class, with one side arguing to keep eucalyptus trees and the other arguing to remove them. Encourage students to bring in images of the eucalyptus—paintings, photographs, or other—as part of their debate.

### En Plein Air

After studying Impressionism in France, Guy Rose was an artist who introduced the idea and practice of *en plein air* painting to the United States. Now it is part of a tradition of landscape painting in California and beyond. Encourage students to try *en plein air* painting. They should bring their canvases and paints to an outdoor setting and, without first laying down a sketch, capture the light, shadow, color, and forms of the setting on their canvas. When they are finished, ask them to compare the experience of painting on-site to painting indoors. What are the benefits and drawbacks of each approach?

### Ode to a Species

Guy Rose was not the only artist to turn his attention to the eucalyptus. A critic at the time called a group of landscapists the “Eucalyptus School.” Writers also loved the tree. Dr. George Wharton James, literary leader of the 1915 Panama-California International Exposition, wrote in his Exposition Memories: “Then, too, the trees! When the wind was blowing I fairly revelled in the moving pictures formed by the tall and stately eucalyptus against the pure blue San Diego sky.”<sup>17</sup>

Challenge students to identify a species of plant or animal in their neighborhood, town, or state that they love and want to paint or write an ode to. What aspects of this species will they highlight? How will they show their appreciation for it in paint or words?

# About the Artwork



Emil J. Kosa Jr., *Freeway Beginning*, circa 1948, Watercolor on heavy wove paper, 22 x 30 in. The Buck Collection at the UCI Institute and Museum of California Art

## About the Artwork

In Emil Kosa's (1903 –1968) watercolor painting, *Freeway Beginning* (circa 1948), an unfinished freeway ramp swoops toward the viewer, offering the prospect of swift movement throughout a growing Los Angeles. The painting emphasizes the contrasts between old and new in a post-World War II urban environment. The historical Bunker Hill neighborhood is painted in the background and behind it looms a silhouetted building in L.A.'s downtown.

Curator Sheri Bernstein calls the painting an “unreservedly positive view of the processes of **urban development** in California.” The freeway, she continues, “spills out welcomingly into the viewer’s space and completely elides the downtown area, which appears only as a benign, picturesque backdrop.”<sup>18</sup>

Kosa was ahead of his time in his selection of subject matter. Before California's Pop Art movement of the 1960s—made famous by David Hockney (b. 1937) and Ed Ruscha (b. 1937)—few of the state's artists documented changes to the built environment. Early painters in the state concentrated mainly on undeveloped landscapes, depicting rugged coastlines and fertile valleys. Kosa was one of a small group of watercolor artists who turned their attention to the human-engineered urbanscape in the 1930s. They painted drive-ins with carhops, open-air markets, double-decker buses, new freeways, bridge construction, and the growth of L.A. traffic. Curator Maudette Ball says these watercolors were a

“documentation of the rapidly changing landscape of California, the tension between the open, rolling hills and the beginning of a high-tech environment.”<sup>19</sup>

In *Freeway Beginning*, Kosa captures the excitement of this post-war boom with its promise of new development and a new way of life. Ball says that in Kosa’s painting, the freeway “comes zooming out at you” as if to say the future is here.<sup>20</sup> Kosa had reason to be optimistic. In 1933, at the height of the Depression, he began working in Hollywood as a **scenic painter** and special effects artist at the 20th Century Fox movie studio. He achieved great success in the industry, pioneered new techniques, and earned an Oscar.

While Kosa’s painting may reflect his positive attitude about these changes, the urban renewal and development projects of the 1940s and 50s (like the expansion of California’s infrastructure) had decidedly negative effects on many lives. These projects often displaced residents

**Kosa was one of a small group of watercolor artists who turned their attention to the human-engineered urbanscape in the 1930s.**

and led to the “white flight” of white residents from urban areas to segregated suburbs, harming non-white urban neighborhoods in the process. Indeed, the neighborhood in Kosa’s painting, Bunker Hill, was the subject of a

campaign to convert “blighted” neighborhoods into profitable new commercial and civic districts. Neighborhood residents fought it, but were unsuccessful.<sup>21</sup> Kosa even made another painting depicting the demolition of Bunker Hill’s Victorian homes to make way for skyscrapers. Yet as curators at the Bowers Museum in Santa Ana, CA write: “We see that these scenes of change are uncondemned by the artist. Indeed, they are as lovingly painted as his idyllic landscapes.”<sup>22</sup>

# About the Artist

# Emil Kosa



Artist Emil Kosa painting *en plein air* in California, 1941.  
Photo by Peter Stackpole/The LIFE Picture Collection  
via Getty Images

## About The Artist

Emil Kosa Jr. (1903–1968) was a key member of the **California Scene Painting** movement, a regional movement in the early decades of the 20th century. California Scene Painters created **landscape paintings** and **genre paintings** depicting everyday lives during times of cultural change—everything from the aftermath of the Great Depression to industrial changes leading up to World War II to the growth of Hollywood.<sup>23</sup>

Born in Paris, France to a mother who was a pianist for the Paris Opera and a father who was an artist, Kosa grew up in the United States and Europe. His family moved to the US when he was four years old, only to move back to his father’s home country of Czechoslovakia four years later. Kosa received art and music instruction at a young age and was talented at both art forms. He eventually chose to pursue visual art, but many who knew him said he could have been a successful musician.<sup>24</sup> He studied in Prague and then at the California Art Institute of Los Angeles.

In 1927, he traveled to France to study art for a year at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris.

After settling in California in 1928, Kosa started a business with his father to produce decorative art in churches and auditoriums. He

also took on portrait commissions and sold his paintings to galleries. By the early 1930s, he was pursuing a career as a watercolorist and was an active member of the California Water Color Society.<sup>25</sup>

In 1933, at the height of the Depression, Kosa started working as a scene painter and special effects artist at the 20th Century Fox movie studio in Hollywood in order to financially support his family. One of his first jobs was designing and painting the famous 20th Century Fox “searchlight” logo. He was an art director at the studio for 35 years and became famous as a matte painter, depicting background locations to create the illusion on film that the characters are in a setting. Kosa won an Academy Award for Visual Effects for his work painting the backdrop of ancient Alexandria in the 1963 film *Cleopatra*. He also painted the ruined Statue of Liberty at the end of the 1968 film *Planet of the Apes*.<sup>26</sup>

**Kosa specialized in contemporary scenes of downtown Los Angeles and dramatic views of the rolling hills and farms in Southern California.**

About the Artist

Emil Kosa

Kosa was a prolific painter in oils and watercolors and would often paint for three or four hours after dinner in addition to spending weekends painting *en plein air*.<sup>27</sup> He specialized in contemporary scenes of downtown Los Angeles and dramatic views of the rolling hills and farms in Southern California. He also made many **commissioned** portraits of movie stars, businessmen, and politicians. He painted the official portrait of Earl Warren, former Governor of California and Chief Justice of the United States, now in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, DC. Kosa even explored **non-objective art** and expressed his love for music through these experimentations.



# View and Discuss

## View and Discuss

Ask students to describe this watercolor painting in detail—starting with the **foreground**, moving to the middle ground, and ending with the background. Compare those parts of the painting.

What choices did the artist make in terms of light and shadow, perspective, subject matter, and framing?

Tell students that Emil Kosa painted backgrounds for movies in Hollywood. This painting was not made for the studio. It is a watercolor he made of Los Angeles, where he lived, but it is also a setting. Ask students what kind of story they think could be set there.

Then ask them to think about the subject matter he chose to paint—a new freeway under construction. Based on how Kosa painted it, what do they think his point of view is on his subject? Explain.

Curator Sheri Bernstein calls the painting an “unreservedly positive view of the processes of urban development in California,”<sup>28</sup> even though developments like new freeways had negative impacts on existing neighborhoods. What do students think about Bernstein’s analysis? Do they agree that Kosa’s view of this development is positive? Why or why not? Ask students how the painting would look if his view of the development was more negative. What would be different?

Ask students to think about new construction in their neighborhoods. What is their point of view on this new development? Is it negative, positive, in-between? Explain.

# Activities

## Activities

### Urban Development

Emil Kosa's painting depicts the post-World War II urban development happening across the United States at the time. This kind of development often had negative consequences for neighborhoods, frequently displacing non-white residents. Today, there are still instances of urban development displacing Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). As an example, show students a recent painting series by artist Eddie Arroyo (b. 1976), who depicts the effects of gentrification in Miami, and compare it to Kosa's depiction: <https://whitney.org/exhibitions/2019-biennial?section=1#exhibition-artworks>

Challenge students to research examples of new development in or near their neighborhoods or cities. Then ask them to make a watercolor painting depicting an aspect of this development. Encourage students to consider how their choice of color, light, perspective, and framing help convey their point of view.

### Scenic Painting

Kosa had a successful career as a scene painter and art director for a movie studio in Hollywood. He painted the backdrops for famous films. For this activity, challenge students in small groups to create a setting or backdrop for a performance. This performance could be a short scene derived from a book, dance, or even a virtual performance designed for a mobile app. Ask students to think about how to create a setting that will work as a backdrop in the format they have chosen—even in a digital format. Then invite students to present performances against these backdrops.

### European vs. American Style

According to curators at the Bowers Museum, Emil Kosa worried that his work was not as experimental as art made in Europe at the time. His friend and painter Millard Sheets (1907–1989) encouraged him to continue to paint in his own style: “You know how to paint. Go out and paint to suit yourself. Paris is all right, but we have a job to do here in America and California.”<sup>29</sup> For this activity, ask students to research and compare paintings that were made in Europe and the United States after World War II. What styles were artists using? What do students think Sheets meant by “we have a job to do here in America and California”? Do students think an American style should be distinct from a European style? Do they think there is an American style of music, film, painting, or writing now? Why or why not? Ask them to write an essay with their ideas about what constitutes or what should constitute an American style and why.

# About the Artwork



Louis Betts, *Mid-Winter, Coronado Beach*, circa 1907, Oil on canvas, 29 x 24 in. The Irvine Museum Collection at the UCI Institute and Museum of California Art

## About the Artwork

In Louis Betts’s (1873–1961) *Mid-Winter, Coronado Beach* (circa 1907), the California sun is its own character. It gleams from the sand, reflects off clothing and skin, and frolics amongst the shadows like visitors to the beach. In the painting’s foreground, two children—one in summer whites and the other in a blue dress with matching bow—appear unsullied by their play in the golden sand. Just behind them, a statuesque woman wearing a bright white dress and shaded by an umbrella strolls past. Further in the background, a sea of beachgoers wade into the frothy surf. It is an idyllic scene that implies many sensory delights: sand in the toes, the spray of cool ocean water, and warm sun beating on skin. Indeed, the painting’s title adds to the suggestion that these beachgoers are to be envied; this is “mid-winter.” Those living in Chicago or New York at this time of year are suffering through the trials of a brutal season: icy sidewalks, creaky furnaces, frostbitten fingers, and cooped-up children. Meanwhile, here in Coronado Beach, a sandy peninsula off the coast of present-day San Diego, CA, life appears good.

*Mid-Winter, Coronado Beach*

Of course, the image is a highly romanticized one. It was produced as part of a railroad company's marketing campaign. Each year, the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway invited popular painters on three- or four-week painting expeditions along train lines in New Mexico, Arizona, or California to make art for use by their advertising department. The resulting paintings were reproduced on train folders, calendars, travel brochures, and dining menus, and the originals displayed in train stations or ticket windows. In exchange, painters traveled for free. The Santa Fe route was used primarily to transport produce and cattle from the West to consumers in the eastern United States, and railroad owners wanted to drum up business for return trips by attracting tourists.<sup>30</sup>

Betts participated in the travel program for two years starting in 1906, and he and other artists made images to appeal to European-Americans with money. This image, with its Impressionist style of loose brushstrokes

**Images by Betts and other artists not only shaped the tourist industry but also contributed to the economic boom of the 1880s and rapid expansion of population in Southern California.**

and playful use of light, would have brought to mind social landscapes in the tradition of European and East Coast Impressionists like Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), Edouard Manet (1832–1883), or William Merritt Chase (1849–1916)—one of Betts' teachers—and their depictions of beach picnics and boating parties.<sup>31</sup> Like other

East Coast Impressionists, Betts' subject matter differed from California Impressionist painters known primarily for their undeveloped, rugged landscapes.

Images by Betts and his fellow commissioned artists not only shaped the tourist industry but also contributed to the economic boom of the 1880s and rapid expansion of population in Southern California. Taken as a whole, they formed the basis for some of the earliest conceptions of California and the "West" in the minds of Americans. Viewed by those on the East Coast, this scene would have presented a very attractive vision of what a railway ticket to California could buy. Yet the construction of the railroads was not a boon to all. A direct result of railroad expansion was the colonization of millions of acres of Indigenous lands. In addition, Chinese laborers who had been recruited by the thousands to build these railroads—and who worked under dangerous conditions for as little as a dollar a day—were laid off after its completion. They found themselves unemployed in the state's depressed labor market of the 1870s. To make matters worse, many white Californians blamed Chinese immigrants for the poor economy and anti-Chinese riots broke out across the state. Eventually, many Californians came to believe that the white men who oversaw and profited from construction of the railroads had accumulated too much wealth and power. Angry citizens criticized the railroad as a monstrous "octopus" strangling other businesses and corrupting government. In this way, romanticized images like Betts' told an incomplete story of the transatlantic railroad and California in the late 19th century.<sup>32</sup>

# About the Artist

# Louis Betts



Louis Betts, 1915. Photo from Alamy Bygone Collection.

## About the Artist

Louis Betts (1873–1961) was born in Little Rock, AR. His mother died soon after he was born and his father, Edwin Daniel Betts, Sr. (1847–1915), was his first art teacher. After his father then married one of his mother’s sisters, the family moved frequently. Louis Betts’s half-siblings, all of whom also grew up to be painters, were each born in different cities: St. Louis, MO, Chicago, IL, and New York City.<sup>33</sup>

In 1894, Betts moved to Philadelphia where he enrolled at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. While there, he studied with William Merritt Chase, one of the era’s most respected art teachers. A successful Impressionist painter who had studied in Europe, Chase painted portraits, **still lifes**, and landscape scenes and was well known as a society portraitist. He often painted portraits of his students to demonstrate techniques in the classroom.<sup>34</sup> A portrait he made of Betts circa 1900 shows a confident man in rimless glasses.<sup>35</sup>

Like his teacher, Betts specialized in **portraiture** and traveled to Europe to study the work of two 17th century painters known for their expressive brushwork and lively portrayal of sitters, Frans Hals (1582–1666) and Diego Velazquez (1599–1660). Betts left for Europe in 1902 with funds from a traveling scholarship.<sup>36</sup>

By 1906, he had settled in Chicago where for two years after his return he participated in the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway’s artists program that invited popular painters on painting expeditions along train lines in New Mexico, Arizona, or California. The resulting paintings were reproduced by the advertising department; in exchange, the artists traveled for free.<sup>37</sup>

In 1910, Betts moved to New York City where he became respected as a portrait and landscape painter and received many portrait commissions. Betts continued to paint Impressionistic works with bright colors, a playful use of light, and a loose style. At the time of his death in August 1961, Betts lived in Bronxville, NY.<sup>38</sup>

**Betts specialized in portraiture and traveled to Europe to study the work of 17th century painters known for their expressive brushwork and lively portrayal of sitters.**

# View and Discuss

## View and Discuss

Ask students to imagine stepping into this painting. What would it be like to be there? Ask them to explore all their senses. What would they hear? Smell? Feel? Encourage them to describe the parts of the painting that they think suggest these sensory experiences.

Share the title, *Mid-Winter, Coronado Beach*, and ask students what it makes them think about the artwork.

Tell students that this painting was produced as part of an advertising campaign developed by a railroad company to increase tourism from the East Coast to the West Coast at the turn of the 20th century. What do they think about the painting now that they know this? Ask students to imagine the company wrote a slogan below the image. What would it be and why?

These images helped to shape conceptions of California across the country. What do students think of when they think of California? How does this image relate to their ideas about the state as it exists now, as well as the state's history?

Some have called these paintings produced for advertising purposes “romanticized” images. What do students think? In what ways might this be a romanticized image of California?

The construction of the railroad enabled people to travel west and discover beautiful scenes of leisure like this one. However, it also resulted in the colonization of millions of acres of Indigenous lands. Thousands of Chinese laborers also risked their lives for as little as a dollar a day to build the railroads and, after their completion, were left without employment and discriminated against by white Californians.

For more information on why and how people settled in California, see the California Historical Society's “Teaching California” primary sources:

[www.teachingcalifornia.org/inquiry-sets/why-did-people-settle-in-california/](http://www.teachingcalifornia.org/inquiry-sets/why-did-people-settle-in-california/)

Also see these primary sources from the National Archives on the impact of westward expansion on Native American communities:

[www.docsteach.org/activities/teacher/the-impact-of-westward-expansion-on-native-american-communities](http://www.docsteach.org/activities/teacher/the-impact-of-westward-expansion-on-native-american-communities)

Ask students: what scenes—positive and negative—would need to be painted to capture the real California of 1907?

# Activities

## Activities

### Art and Marketing

*Mid-Winter, Coronado Beach* was painted as part of a marketing effort by a railroad company. Ask students if they can recall seeing ads for any travel destinations. How do travel companies advertise today? You might discuss social media marketing campaigns or more traditional methods like billboards. How do their images try to entice visitors? For this activity, students should step into the role of marketer. First, ask students to choose a place they love, whether it is somewhere they visit frequently or not. Then ask them to paint a picture of it that might entice people to visit. What techniques will they use? Will they make it realistic or romanticize aspects of the place? What perspectives, times of day, or scenes will they choose? After reflecting on their artworks together, discuss how marketing employs different artistic techniques.

### Settling in California

Paintings like Louis Betts's were not the only reason why people settled in California. Most did not come for mid-winter vacations and leisurely walks on the beach. Talk with students about the reasons migrants and immigrants came to California throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For instance, thousands of Chinese laborers were recruited to help build the railroad. These jobs were dangerous and low-paying, and once the railroad was completed, the laborers were left without employment and became the focus of anti-Chinese violence. View and analyze the photographs and other primary sources on these sites—about settlement in California and work on the transatlantic railroad, respectively—and compare to images like Betts'. Here are two useful references:  
[www.teachingcalifornia.org/inquiry-sets/why-did-people-settle-in-california/](http://www.teachingcalifornia.org/inquiry-sets/why-did-people-settle-in-california/)  
<https://calisphere.org/exhibitions/18/the-transcontinental-railroad/>

Encourage students to pick one figure from either Betts's painting or a photograph from the time. Assuming the perspective of that figure, they should write a postcard home to a family member or friend and describe the California they have encountered. What different perspectives of California do these postcards reveal?

### The Impact of Art on the Environment in the West

European American artists had a major impact on the environment in the western United States. Population booms and industrial development from colonial settlement and tourism dramatically increased water and air pollution and led to major changes in agriculture. While paintings like Betts' spurred greater public appreciation for environmental treasures and legislation to protect them, these changes often resulted in dire consequences for some groups. Thomas Moran's (1837–1926) watercolor paintings of Yellowstone in 1871 led to the creation of the first national park. During an 1872 debate in Washington, DC, railroad executives used the paintings in their argument for land **preservation**.<sup>39</sup> However, the creation of the national parks also resulted in the displacement of Native Americans from Indigenous territories their ancestors had historically occupied and used.

## Activities

Artworks made by Indigenous artists offer a different perspective. As a class, research artists such as Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (b. 1940) and Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds (b. 1954) or California-based artists such as Gerald Clarke, Jr. (b. 1967) and Mercedes Dorame (b. 1980). What stories do they tell? What images do they use to tell them? How do they compare to artists like Betts?

Then ask students to select an environmental issue they care about—whether it is the preservation of an endangered species or body of water or a type of pollution they are concerned about. Ask them to think about and research that issue from multiple perspectives and give oral presentations to the class about what they learn. For older students, these presentations could include proposed legislation. As an added challenge, students could be asked to create persuasive posters to bolster their oral arguments.

# Vocabulary

## Vocabulary

Source: Merriam-Webster.com (unless stated otherwise)

**Anthropomorphize:** to attribute human form or personality to

**California Scene Painting:** a regional art movement in the early decades of the 20th century of mainly landscape and genre paintings depicting everyday lives during times of cultural change

Source: Hilbert Museum of California Art

**Commissioned:** ordered to be made in exchange for payment

**En plein air:** of or relating to painting in outdoor daylight

**Foreground:** the part of a scene or representation that is nearest to and in front of the spectator

**Genre paintings:** paintings of scenes from everyday life, of ordinary people in work or recreation, depicted in a generally realistic manner

Source: Britannica.com

**Impressionism:** a theory or practice in painting, especially among French painters of about 1870, depicting the natural appearances of objects by means of dabs or strokes of primary unmixed colors in order to simulate actual reflected light

**Preservation:** the activity or process of keeping something valued alive, intact, or free from damage or decay

**Landscape paintings:** a picture representing a view of natural inland scenery

**Lithograph:** print from a plane surface (such as a smooth stone or metal plate) on which the image to be printed is ink-receptive and the blank area ink-repellent

**Non-native species:** species that have occurred outside of their natural range; that natural range could be as far as another country or as near as a different region of the same country

Source: The National Park Service at nps.gov

**Non-objective art:** art representing or intended to represent no natural or actual object, figure, or scene

**Portraiture:** pictorial representations of a person usually showing the face

**Romanticized:** treated as idealized or heroic

**Scenic or scene painter:** a painter of theatrical scenery

**Still life:** a picture consisting predominantly of inanimate objects

**Urban development:** the development or improvement of an urban area by building

Source: collinsdictionary.com

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