

For Immediate Release
May 3, 2023

LANGSON IMCA ANNOUNCES SUMMER EXHIBITION

Indefinitely Wild: Preserving California's Natural Resources

On view June 3 – September 9, 2023

Media Preview: Friday, June 2, 2023, 10 am – 12 pm

Irvine, CA...UCI Jack and Shanaz Langson Institute and Museum of California Art (Langson IMCA) will present *Indefinitely Wild: Preserving California's Natural Resources*, an exhibition exploring how the early history of environmental preservation and conservation of the state's natural resources can be considered relative to the work of artists of the same period.

On view June 3 through September 9, 2023, in Langson IMCA's interim museum space at 18881 Von Karman Avenue, the exhibition comprises 25 paintings and six watercolors drawn from Langson IMCA's collection. This is the first time that these six works on paper will be on public view.



In the exhibition, guest curator Cassandra Coblentz juxtaposes turn-of-the-century landscape paintings of the state's natural resources with historical materials and photographs of human activities that depleted or commodified California's natural bounty. The selected works demonstrate how the featured artists considered humans' relationships to nature alongside the impacts of industrialization and California's population boom in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Coblentz said, "The exhibition's title *Indefinitely Wild* draws on a quote by Henry David Thoreau, who writes of the 'tonic' of 'unfathomable' wild spaces, such as those depicted in the exhibited works. As presented here, they offer viewers an opportunity to consider landscape paintings in Langson IMCA's collection from a fresh perspective. My hope is that by reflecting on these works in the context of the history of conservation and preservation as well as the industrial development of our state, viewers will have a more nuanced understanding of the persistent need for protection and care of California's natural environment and its wild spaces."

A range of ephemera complements the paintings and documents the state's early industrialization alongside the development of environmental preservation and conservation practices. This ephemera includes both original and reproduced archival photography, newspaper clippings, advertisements, and other materials sourced from the Special Collections and Archives of UCI Libraries, among other institutions.

The exhibition is organized into five sections that explore specific natural resources that inspired these artists.

Mountains

In the 19th century, American writers and philosophers believed a pristine natural environment had life-affirming, spiritual powers. Artists such as Alson Skinner Clark, Edgar Payne, and Karl Yens were steeped in this thinking of nature as awesome or sublime and ventured to remote



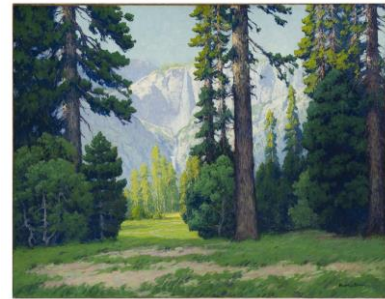
locations to paint outside *en plein air*. In Clark's *California Mountains* (1921), a cerulean sky and dramatic clouds dominate the landscape, while in Payne's composition *Rugged Peaks* (circa 1921), mountains are presented as massive sentinels above an unspoiled valley.

California's natural beauty attracted adventurers, many spurred by the Gold Rush. Modern mining soon flourished, extracting a heavy toll on the land and rivers. Naturalist John Muir wrote extensively about the Sierra Nevada mountains and threats to them. In 1892, he and other advocates formed

the Sierra Club, ushering in a new era of organized conservation and preservation activism to help protect wild spaces.

Trees

Railroads enabled California's industrialization, and their construction required vast supplies of timber logged in the state's northern forests. Considered from this perspective, the lush, peaceful grove in Harry Cassie Best's *Redwoods* (circa 1910) and Maurice Braun's *Yosemite Falls from the Valley* (1918) take on a poignant tone. *Laguna Eucalyptus* (1917) by Guy Rose illustrates how this ubiquitous, non-native species blended into the landscape.



By the time many of the paintings in this section had been completed, the devastation of logging activities had been recognized nationally. In 1864, President Lincoln signed a bill protecting Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Trees from over-development, and California gained protective custody of the area's forests. These measures led to the eventual creation of the US National Park Service in 1916.

The Coast

Paintings by William Lees Judson, George Garner Symons, and Guy Rose depict unspoiled California coastlines, views that were becoming increasingly scarce. These are juxtaposed with works such as Louis Betts' *Mid-Winter, Coronado Beach* (circa 1907), which portrays people enjoying a sunny day at the seashore—a reflection of Southern California's desirable lifestyle. In 1906, the Topeka and Santa Fe Railways commissioned similar paintings from Betts and other artists to promote tourism to California.



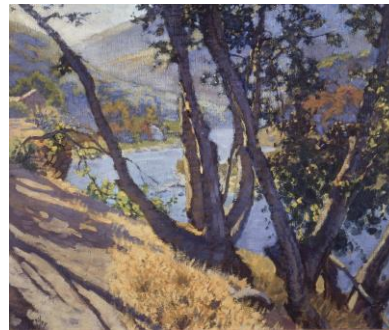
During this period, industrial growth and development expanded rapidly, forever altering coastal environments. Granville Redmond's atmospheric *Los Angeles, San Pedro Harbor* (circa 1906) captures the busy port at sunset.

Water

By 1849, the non-Indigenous population of California increased tenfold, from less than 10,000 to 100,000. Within three years, it rose to 255,000, and by 1930 Los Angeles alone was home to over one million people. The construction of aqueducts, dams, and reservoirs became crucial to

drain lakes and rivers, channeling water—an essential resource—to burgeoning cities, farmlands, and ranches.

While not directly addressing issues of water conservation, depictions of arroyos and rivers provide important documentation before these waterways were altered or eradicated. The dry creek bed and trickling stream in Franz A. Bischoff's *Arroyo Seco Bridge* (1912) is now a concrete flood channel, and Chanell Pickering Townsley's *Bend of the River* (1919) depicts a view of the San Gabriel River that no longer exists in its natural state.



Land

As uncultivated land was quickly being turned into groves, farmland, and ranches, artists persisted in capturing expansive meadows and wide-open spaces. Angel Espoy and William Wendt used bold colors to paint poppy fields and verdant hills during springtime, while Charles Arthur Fries and William Alexander Griffith depicted the parched landscape during California's dry seasons.



For some artists in this section, there is a visible reverence for the scale of the land and humankind's relation to it. In Griffith's *The Bean Ranch* (1931), a farmer on a tractor is dwarfed by the imposing mountains in the background. Farms are also the subject of the watercolors by James Patrick and Margaret Sheppard.

Excerpts from the award-winning 2009 documentary miniseries "The National Parks: America's Best Idea," co-produced and directed by Ken Burns and co-produced and written by Clayton Duncan, will be featured in the exhibition. Langson IMCA will announce related public programs closer to the opening.

About UCI Jack and Shanaz Langson Institute and Museum of California Art

UCI Jack and Shanaz Langson Institute and Museum of California Art (Langson IMCA) is home to two foundational gifts of California Art from The Irvine Museum and Gerald E. Buck estate. In addition, the permanent collection of more than 4,500 works from the late 19th century and early 20th century through present day continues to grow, augmented by acquisitions and gifts. The university is planning to construct a permanent museum and research institute to serve as a global magnet for the presentation and study of California Art within its social, historical, environmental, and cultural frameworks. The facility is slated to open in 2027. Langson IMCA is located in an interim museum space at 18881 Von Karman Avenue, Suite 100 in Irvine, CA. It is open to all, and admission and parking is free. For more information, visit imca.uci.edu.

About the University of California, Irvine

Founded in 1965, UCI is the youngest member of the prestigious Association of American Universities. The campus has produced three Nobel laureates and is known for its academic achievement, premier research, innovation, and anteater mascot. Led by Chancellor Howard Gillman, UCI has more than 36,000 students and offers 222 degree programs. It is located in one of the world's safest and most economically vibrant communities and is Orange County's second-largest employer, contributing \$5 billion annually to the local economy. For more on UCI, visit www.uci.edu. Follow us on Instagram @ucimca.

* * *

Media Contacts

For additional information, Libby Mark or Heather Meltzer at Bow Bridge Communications, LLC, New York City, +1 917-968-5567; info@bow-bridge.com.

Image Captions (top to bottom)

Franz A. Bischoff, *Monterey Farm*, after 1906, Oil on board, 13 x 18 in. UCI Jack and Shanaz Langson Institute and Museum of California Art, Gift of The Irvine Museum Art

Alson Skinner Clark, *California Mountains*, 1921, Oil on canvas, 36 x 45 in. UCI Jack and Shanaz Langson Institute and Museum of California Art, Gift of The Irvine Museum

Maurice Braun, *Yosemite Falls from the Valley*, 1918, Oil on canvas, 36 x 46 in. UCI Jack and Shanaz Langson Institute and Museum of California Art, Gift of The Irvine Museum

George Gardner Symons, *Southern California Coast*, before 1913, Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 in. UCI Jack and Shanaz Langson Institute and Museum of California Art, Gift of The Irvine Museum

Channel Pickering Townsley, *Bend of the River*, 1919, Oil on canvas, 25 x 30 in. UCI Jack and Shanaz Langson Institute and Museum of California Art, Gift of The Irvine Museum

Angel Espoy, *Untitled (Poppies, Lupines and Cows)*, after 1914, Oil on canvas, 30 x 40 in. UCI Jack and Shanaz Langson Institute and Museum of California Art, Gift of The Irvine Museum