

For Immediate Release
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Langson IMCA Presents New Exhibition
Bohemian of the Arroyo Seco: Idah Meacham Strobridge

September 30, 2023 – January 13, 2024

Media Preview: Friday, September 29, 2023, 10 am to noon PT



Fernand Lungren, *Bastions of the Painted Desert*, circa 1910

Irvine, CA...UCI Jack and Shanaz Langson Institute and Museum of California Art ([Langson IMCA](#)) will present a new exhibition featuring the work of influential artists who were part of a creative community active in the early 1900s along the banks of the Arroyo Seco in Los Angeles County, California. [Bohemian of the Arroyo Seco: Idah Meacham Strobridge](#) is the first exhibition exploring the impact this pioneering gallerist and writer had on the development of Los Angeles culture during this period.

A well-known author, accomplished bookbinder, rancher, and miner when she settled in the Arroyo Seco in 1901, Idah Meacham Strobridge (1855–1932) became a pivotal figure in the area's burgeoning community of free spirits and cultural entrepreneurs.

In her expansive residence, Strobridge operated a bookbindery, Artemisia Bindery, as well as one of the area's first art galleries from 1905 to 1910. Her Little Corner of Local Art gallery provided critical exposure for rising talents, and her home became a welcoming hub for like-minded makers, neighbors, and visitors. The California *plein air* painting movement originated in the Arroyo Seco during this period, and Strobridge's gallery was a launching point and support for numerous *plein air* painters, including Hanson Duvall Puthuff. It also was an important support for emerging artists who painted Southwestern themes, such as Carl Oscar Borg.

Bohemian of the Arroyo Seco is organized by guest curator [Susan M. Anderson](#) and features 26 works by 17 artists. The works are drawn from Langson IMCA's collection and loans from Laguna Art Museum (Laguna Beach, CA) and Hilbert Museum of California Art (Orange, CA). Photographs of the Arroyo Seco and original copies of Strobridge's books about life in the West, which she wrote and hand bound at Artemisia Bindery, provide further background and context.



Carl Oscar Borg, *In Walpi, Arizona*, circa 1934

The artists in Strobridge's circle whose work is featured in the exhibition include Carl Oscar Borg, Maynard Dixon, Fernand Lungren, Granville Redmond, Hernando Villa, Elmer Wachtel, and Marion Kavanagh Wachtel. Their recorded visits to active Native American settlements informed their portrayals of Indigenous ways of life, as well as remnants of the earlier Spanish Mission period (1769–1833) and Mexican rancho period (1834–1848). The artists' romanticized depictions of the ranchos (ranches), missions, and Indigenous peoples proved lucrative for regional boosters as they helped entice people to travel west.

Plein air landscape paintings by late 19th/early 20th century contemporaries William Lees Judson, Hanson Duvall Puthuff, and Norman St. Clair provide additional perspectives on the region's environmental beauty.

Anderson said, "Idah Meacham Strobridge led an extraordinary life, reinventing herself in response to changed circumstances. Living close to the Overland Trail in Nevada and then the railroad, she witnessed the migration west and people starting their lives anew. Resettling in what was essentially an artists' colony along the Arroyo Seco at the turn of the 20th century, she became a vital resource for artists, writers, and craftspeople by enabling their work to be displayed and published. She provided numerous artists—many on view in this exhibition and others lost to history—with their first public exposure."

"Susan's meticulous research illuminates Idah Meacham Strobridge's remarkable and far-reaching contributions to the development of California art in the early 20th century and how the artists in her circle captured the region's unique sense of place," added Langson IMCA Museum Director Kim Kanatani. "Susan's selection further reveals the impact of the international Arts and Crafts movement on the distinctive manifestations of the American Southwest experience in Los Angeles."

About Idah Meacham Strobridge

Born in 1855 into a ranching family in California's Moraga Valley outside Oakland, Idah Meacham and her parents relocated in 1863 to homestead a ranch in the remote desert of Humboldt County, Nevada. To serve the multitudes journeying west by wagon and rail, her father operated a hotel and restaurant called Humboldt House, a newly established Central Pacific Railroad station, where his daughter was exposed to a diversity of residents, guests, travelers, and passersby.

After graduating from Mills Seminary in Oakland in 1883, Idah married Samuel Hooker Strobridge, anticipating a life of cattle ranching and mining on her father's land in Nevada. However, during an exceptionally harsh winter in 1888 and 1889, followed by drought, Strobridge's husband and two surviving infant sons succumbed to pneumonia and the cattle herd was decimated.



Hans Robinson, Idah Meacham Strobridge, before 1911

To help provide for herself and parents, Idah claimed and superintended a gold mine, expecting that it would prove profitable. During this period, she taught herself the craft of hand bookbinding, launched Artemisia Bindery, and began writing. She published short stories and articles about her love for desert life, which she eventually collected into three volumes. One of her early supporters was the writer and Native American rights activist Charles Fletcher Lummis, another influential member of the Arroyo Seco community.

In 1901, Strobridge and her parents sold their Nevada property and returned to Los Angeles, where she reestablished Artemisia Bindery and embraced a new lifestyle by settling into the flourishing community of artists, artisans, writers, publishers, and other creatives living and working along the Arroyo Seco. Several artists in her circle also worked as illustrators for the railroad companies, boosting the numerous attributes of California and helping to attract tourists and potential residents to the region.

Strobridge opened Little Corner of Local Art gallery in 1905, and immediately garnered the attention of the art critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, Antony E. Anderson, who regularly reviewed her exhibitions. In 1909, a winning review by Anderson drew 700 visitors during the first two weeks of an exhibition in her gallery. Two new organizations were established that same year: California Art Club, which quickly became the largest art association in Southern California and in operation today; and the short-lived Arroyo Guild of Craftsmen that operated until 1915. Strobridge closed her gallery in 1910, and published her final story collection, *The Land of Purple Shadows*, later that year, completing her Sagebrush Trilogy.

Remaining active in local literary circles, Strobridge spent her final two decades working with civic organizations, clubs, and genealogical societies in and around Pasadena. She was a member of the Southern California Press Club, among other entities. Her retreats to her converted fisherman's shack on the Pacific's San Pedro Breakwater remained a favorite activity. She continued to operate her bookbindery until her death in 1932 at the age of 76.

About the Arroyo Seco Community

The Arroyo Seco—a seasonal river, canyon, and watershed in Los Angeles County that was home to the Tongva people—falls 5,200 feet from its headwaters at Mount Wilson in the San Gabriel Mountains to its mouth and confluence at the Los Angeles River. At the turn of the 20th



Elizabeth Jaynes Borglum, *Facade of Mission San Juan Capistrano*, circa 1895

century, it was a vibrant cultural hub and regional center for American Arts and Crafts practitioners. The community included artists, writers, and artisans seeking to escape prevailing conventions wrought by Victorianism and the Industrial Revolution for a lifestyle characterized by simplicity, harmony, and mutual support. Eschewing mass production and machine-made objects, they engaged in aesthetic pursuits reflecting the region's natural beauty and history, creating *plein air* paintings, handicrafts featuring coastal oak and redwood, architecture in the Mission Revival style, and art and literature highlighting the American Southwest.

Strobridge's Little Corner of Local Art gallery became the epicenter for kindred spirits inspired by the Southwest—its landscape, history, Indigenous peoples, and unique attributes. A savvy host thanks to her experience at Humboldt House, her family's hotel and restaurant in Nevada, Strobridge made the gallery a tourist draw, providing artists and artisans with patrons and a livelihood for their art- and craft-making.

The first in Los Angeles with an ongoing, focused program, the gallery contributed to artistic and intellectual exchange between celebrated painters such as William Wendt and Hanson Duvall Puthuff, as well as key proponents of the American Arts and Crafts movement, such as Charles Fletcher Lummis, editor of *Land of Sunshine* magazine, and George Wharton James, former associate editor of *Craftsmen* magazine published by Gustav Stickley out of New York.

Bohemian of the Arroyo Seco: Idah Meacham Strobridge is on view September 30, 2023 – January 13, 2024, at Langson IMCA's interim museum location at 18881 Von Karman Avenue. Public programs will be announced 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 @uciimca.

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Image Captions (top to bottom)

Fernand Lungren, *Bastions of the Painted Desert*, circa 1910, Oil on canvas, 20 x 40 in. Laguna Art Museum Collection, 2010.002.001, Gift of Nancy Dustin Wall Moure.

Carl Oscar Borg, *In Walpi, Arizona*, circa 1934, Oil on canvas, 26 x 30 in. The Buck Collection at UCI Jack and Shanaz Institute and Museum of California Art

Hans Robinson, Idah Meacham Strobridge, before 1911, Print. Neg # 28496. Courtesy of the California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento, California. Image has been edited from the original provided by California State Library.

Elizabeth Jaynes Borglum, *Facade of Mission San Juan Capistrano*, circa 1895, Oil on canvas, 15 x 22 in. UCI Jack and Shanaz Langson Institute and Museum of California Art, Gift of The Irvine Museum