

# Art is best appreciated in person

By Robert Schimmel

We boys escaped from the mountaintop to the flatland recently and it was a huge reminder of how much more one can gain from periodically, if not regularly, taking in an artist's original work and actually looking behind the veil of the usual presentations in a book or on a website.

Case in point, my dear friend David and I made the trek to the Crocker Museum in Sacramento to view, in particular, the Edgar Payne exhibit. So, why spend the time, gas, etc., to go "face to image" when there are so many alternative and easier ways? Glad you asked.



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Without going too deeply into the after effects of such a simple journey and effort, I find two predominant reasons surfacing. First, the very act of looking and searching the real – not virtual – painting, sculpture, etc., puts me in the artist's frame of reference or shoes, so to speak, to the degree that I can feel the size and form of the piece as it relates to the actual subject matter, actually see and sense the individual imprints or brushstrokes that may pound or caress the canvas or clay, and absorb the elements of design (color, texture, line, space, etc.) as well as the principals that govern their use (like scale, unity, rhythm, contrast,

balance, and so forth.)

Second, and perhaps most important, are the relationship and exchange of ideas that occur during such a journey to and confrontation with the chosen artwork. This is the all too infrequent alone and focused time spent with another artist (David, in my case) or non-artist that isn't under the guise of art reception etiquette or gatherings that are either limited by time or harried by constant social interruptions.

Good quality museum exhibits, such as this one, generally offer quite a variety of ways to experience the artist and his/her art that transcend the simple one dimensional viewing experience of a book, poster, or web site. Instead of flipping or clicking pages, one is walking to and fro around and up close to literal history and real handmade objects and surfaces. Texture, line and color speak loudest while the artist's intent and emotional purpose slowly coalesce for the viewer into an ever-clarifying voice that may or may not be a chorus of personal meaning. You can even get a recorded tour in such exhibits to follow and learn some of the more obscure facts re the artist and certain pieces that bring an earthy and intimate connection not possible otherwise. Similarly, seeing two men beat each other silly on TV or, God forbid, shoot one another on a newscast, is a far cry from being within sweat or blood spattering distance and having the anger or fear literally permeate your being. Same thing here, only hopefully more peaceful and edifying in an art exhibit setting or live art demonstration.

Witnessing the progression and evolution of a serious, dedicated artist's work over many years is truly an honor, and the lessons learned or paradigms changed that come to light under such an auspicious setting are often quite profound for artist and voyeur alike. Take Edgar Payne – one of California's most gifted early plein air painters – his work was large, bold and tight prior to visiting Europe in the early 1920s, but there he became influenced by the

Impressionists and their broader, less detailed approach. This changed his work and style forever, and we witnessed as well as felt the impact on his life and the tensions in his work. The power of his images and the forces of transition would just not be apparent or tenable from any other kind of venue or presentation.

My personal belief, especially as an artist, is that such an all encompassing, firsthand view of a body of original work will take me inside myself and make me question and quantify aspects of my own life and work unlike any other experience. Add to that the ear and feedback from another artist, or respected opinion without inhibitions, and the ingredients for a fabulous eye opening and uplifting exchange are in place.

May your gallery-hopping and art appreciation take on new excitement or meaning and become more frequent.

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