

Exhibit celebrates artistic history of Laguna Beach

Vivid and radiant images of historic Laguna Beach landscapes are on display at UC Irvine Langson Library's latest exhibit, "Open Air & Light."

Curated by Stephen MacLeod, the exhibit takes artgoers on a journey through the

vibrant art community in southern Orange County from 1906 to 1941.

"Laguna Beach has long been renowned for its natural beauty and love for the arts," said Lorelei Tanji, university librarian. "This exhibit explores the early history of its development into an art colony and illustrates how broad support from the community really played a significant role in terms of (the city's) development."

"The history of Laguna as an art colony is an important part of the cultural legacy of Laguna Beach," said Tanji. "In fact it's very important for our whole region and our state. Interest in California impressionism remains high in large part due to the efforts of local museums and cultural heritage institutions."

MacLeod said the title of the exhibit is a play on words for the French expression "en plein air," which translates to "in the open air." Plein air is also a phrase used for describing painting outdoors.

"There have been numerous exhibits with paintings from this era but not a lot of material that really tells a story or (the) history of Laguna," said MacLeod.

Laguna Beach became a



STEVEN GEORGES, FOR THE REGISTER

Guests look over displays of artwork that are part of the "Open Air & Light" celebrating Laguna Beach's artistic history at UC Irvine's Langson Library.



James Irvine Swinden, president of the Irvine Museum, gives a talk.

haven for artists from around the globe in the early 1900's including well-known impressionists and landscape painters such as William Wendt, Isaac Jenkinson Frazee, George Gardner Symons, Edgar Payne and Guy Rose.

In 1918, Laguna Beach was home to about 300 people, including dozens of artists who were inspired by the rolling hills, towering bluffs, and stunning ocean views. This caused the city

to open its first gallery in the old town hall building. Shortly after the gallery's success, artists and residents formed the Laguna Beach Art Association. Today, Laguna Beach is known as a strong artistic community.

To obtain images of paintings and archival materials for the exhibit, the UC Irvine Libraries partnered with the Bowers Museum, the Irvine Museum, the Laguna Art Museum, the Laguna Beach Historical Society, the Frazee family and the Peter and Gail Ochs Collection.

James Irvine Swinden, president of the Irvine Museum, believes many of the great works of art featuring Laguna Beach can be credited to the city's weather.

"We're just so fortunate that we live in an area that has an unbelievable light source," said Swinden. "I always marvel when I think about these paintings. These artists could actually go back the next day at the same time to work on a

'Open Air & Light'

When: Now through April

Where: Muriel Ansley Reynolds Gallery in Langson Library, UC Irvine

Cost: Free

Information: exhibits.lib.uci.edu

piece and almost be guaranteed the same weather. You can't do that on the East Coast."

Although Swinden said he has trouble picking a favorite artist, the one that resonates with him most is California native Guy Rose, who is known for his beautiful landscape paintings of Laguna Beach shorelines, bluffs, and eucalyptus trees.

"Open Art & Light" will be on display in the Library through April.

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