



ASMA

NEWS AND JOURNAL

Fall 2017

A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF MARINE ARTISTS

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF AMERICAN MARINE ART AND THE FREE EXCHANGE OF IDEAS BETWEEN ARTISTS



Visit our Web Site at: www.americansocietyofmarineartists.com

ASMA JOURNAL

Notes From Brush Hill

by Charles Raskob Robinson
Brush Hill Studios, Washington, CT

In the last issue we met the “bi-coastal” Signature Member Michelle Jung who lives and works in California and Massachusetts and two new members, the father and son team of artists and sailors from France, Pierre and Luc Bernay, and followed their voyage in a steel-hulled sloop to Antarctica to plein air paint. In this issue we meet a new Signature Member, Brent Jensen – an artist who went from a career of professional architectural rendering to a full time Impressionist artist.

BRENT JENSEN

Signature Member, San Francisco, CA
[Web site: www.brentjensenart.com](http://www.brentjensenart.com)

“For all at last returns to the sea – to Oceanus, the ocean river, like the ever flowing stream of time, the beginning and the end.”



The last sentence in Rachel Carson's best selling 1950 book *The Sea Around Us*.¹ Carson (1907-1964) was one of the most respected science writers of her time and, with her publication of *Silent*

(Footnotes)

¹ Rachel Carson, *The Sea Around Us*, Oxford University Press, 1950, ISBN-10: 0195069978; ISBN-13: 978-0195069976

² When Brent was forty-five, he assumed his mother's maiden name, Jensen.

³ In keeping with the times, Tristram Coffin was prolific; when he died at 76 he had seven children and over 60 grandchildren and great grandchildren. Many went to sea but not all were captains. The tragic fate of one young Coffin is remembered in history when in November, 1820 a large whale rammed and sunk his whaleship, the 87-foot Essex, and forced the crew of twenty to take to three boats in the middle of the Pacific. For 89 days they were at sea. As they died from thirst and starvation,



"Shipyard" • 30" x 40" • Oil

Spring, launched an environmental movement that has steadily grown over the generations.

Sea Genes

When the lure of the sea is in the blood, it can last over the generations. This is the case for Brent Jensen. Although he was born (May 4, 1958) in the mountains of Elko, Nevada to Frank Oldroyd, a store manager, and Julia Jensen² and raised with his six siblings in more mountains in Evanston, Wyoming – both places not only far distant from

the survivors ate them. When these rations failed and more were needed, they drew straws and the first cousin of the captain, young Owen Coffin lost out. Eight however did survive. (For the full story see: Nathaniel Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex*, 2000, Penguin Books, ISBN-10: 0141001828, ISBN-13: 978-0141001821.) Three decades later, in 1851, Herman Melville wrote *Moby Dick*. It memorializes the Essex event when, at the end of the story, the Great White Whale Moby Dick dramatically sinks the whaleship Pequod that had been pursuing it obsessively under the command of Captain Ahab.

the oceans but a mile above sea level, the sea genes were in his blood and surfaced as he grew older. Brent is a direct descendant, through his mother, of Tristram Coffin (originally spelled Coffyn) who was born in 1609 in Brixton Parish near Plymouth, England and emigrated with his wife, Dionis, and their family to Massachusetts in 1642 where Tristram, a successful businessman, eventually bought the Island of Nantucket with a group of others, including members of two other families, the Starbucks and the Gardners. He became the first magistrate of the island in 1671 and his family began whaling seriously in the 1690s. By the middle of the 1700s, his sons were captaining a half dozen whalers and venturing into far distant waters. The lure of the sea was in the blood³. His daughter, Mary Coffyn Starbuck, became a leader in introducing Quaker practices into Nantucket. The Whaling Museum in New Bedford, MA has an excellent permanent

Notes From Brush Hill



"Ancient Discoveries" • 18" x 24" • Oil

presentation about her work and the eventual importance of Quakers in the whaling industry. In time, petroleum replaced whale oil and the economic activity of Nantucket slowed dramatically, leading many to leave, among them the ancestors of Brent's mother who moved down the East Coast and eventually came West where his parents met.

There are no professional artists among Brent's siblings, although his mother is an accomplished quilter and his Uncle Dane Jensen is an artist. It was one of Dane's works that greatly influenced Brent's art future for he drew a copy of one of Dane's paintings in school and the teacher was so impressed they entered it into a state-wide competition and Brent won. He was in the sixth grade!

Thus encouraged and interested in art, young Brent found himself doing a lot of plein painting art around his home in Evanston in Uinta County with its rolling mountains, wide valleys and mountain lakes and rivers. If you "fly" in Google Earth at an altitude about 2,000 feet above the Bear Creek Valley where Evanston is located, the undulating hills and mountains and vast spaces you see

(Footnotes)

⁴ Kevin Macpherson, *Fill Your Oil Paintings with Light and Color*, North Light Books, new edition 2000, ISBN-10: 1581800533, ISBN-13: 978-1581800531, 144 pages.

⁵ Emile Gruppe, *Brushwork for the Oil Painter*, Watson-Guption Publisher, Revised Edition 1983, ISBN-10: 0823005267, ISBN-13: 978-0823005260, 144 pages.

from the cockpit give you a sense of the open rolling sea. But young Brent did not need "to fly" for he found a marine world in the beautiful mountain lakes. It was the subconscious beginning of Brent's sea genes surfacing. "Growing up in the Rocky Mountains we did all things boating-wise on the lakes (motor boats only.) Going to Salt Lake City was always an adventure where I would see the beautiful sailboats glistening on the Great Salt Lake. Growing up my grandma Myrtle (Coffin) Jensen would tell us stories of the Coffins and Starbucks on Nantucket with the whaling ships. Envisioning such large ships in seaport harbors was always such a mystical idea for me."

"This is what drew me back to New England after graduation from high school. For about two years I lived and painted in Connecticut and port towns from Massachusetts to Maine. It was there, seeing the ships and boats in the New England harbors, where I developed my love of painting maritime subjects." The sea genes were becoming more apparent.

In 1980 he returned West and enrolled in the University of Utah, majoring in art. He worked his way through university doing jobs ranging from being a soups chef in a restaurant to working with a real estate developer – where he first got interested in architectural rendering that turned out to become his full time career

after he graduated. While attending the University, he met and married Julia Hart and they had a daughter, Alexis, who arrived in 1987, the same year he received his BA degree from the University. Brent notes that, "Now, twenty years later, Alexis lives in San Francisco and is an excellent artist especially in water colors. We often plein air paint together and continue to learn from each other."

In 1990 Brent moved to Los Angeles where he worked as an architectural illustrator before opening his own business, ArtBoard in 1995. This architectural illustration company provided new construction renderings for many of the largest homebuilders in the Western United States. In addition to new home construction, renderings were



"Portrait of an Artist" • 24" x 18" • Oil

completed on numerous commercial buildings and event centers throughout California. "Some years I had a dozen artists working for me on projects using gouache, acrylic, water color, pencil, oil and pen and ink techniques. We must have done 30,000 renderings!"

"However successful this business was, the creative dimension of what I set out originally to engage in, namely, art, had been put on hold. But that began to change in 2002 when I went on vacation to Europe. My love of Impressionism was

rekindled while visiting the Uffizi Gallery in Florence and the D'Orsay Museum and the Louvre in Paris. That trip prompted me to begin painting again, something I hadn't done regularly since my university studies in the 'Eighties. For the next five years, I ran the busy architectural illustration business and oil painted part-time. During this period, I became a voracious reader of art books, a practice that continued and led to a significant library. The first book I studied was *Oil Paintings with Light & Color* by Kevin MacPherson⁴. I continue to refer to it often. Another ongoing influence is *Brushwork for the Oil Painter* by Emile Gruppe (1896-1978)⁵. It was also during this five-year period, in October 2005 that I studied with C.W. Mundy (Charles Warren Mundy b. 1945) at a French chateau in the Loire Valley. He helped me appreciate the science of art and how to tweak it to add poetry to the work. "C.W." had many insightful sayings and one that continues to resonate with me through the years is, 'The power of suggestion is greater than the statement of reality.' Applying this truth as a traditional Impressionist has allowed me to remain loose and focus on large shapes in my paintings.

Art became increasingly more interesting than the work of ArtBoard and so, in 2007, Brent sold the company and began the life of a full time artist. During these years in Los Angeles, his marriage ended in divorce and he met Steve Morris who worked as an administrator in a law firm. Their relationship developed over the years and eventually they married. In 2008 they moved to San Francisco where Steve got a job with Cooley LLP, an international law firm founded in 1920 in San Francisco but now headquartered in Palo Alto, California, with offices throughout United States, in the United Kingdom and China. The firm specializes in corporate law, litigation and intellectual property and is recognized as a leader for its technology practice, being viewed as one of Silicon Valley's "go-to" law firms.

Invest in Yourself

Brent believes an artist can continually learn from others. "Taking workshops from artists you respect is good for any artist. Life learning is key to continual success and progress in one's chosen profession. It's easy



"Harbor Colors" • 30" x 48" • Oil

for an artist with a bit of a solitary existence to not push oneself. A scheduled workshop creates a space for you to be vulnerable, face fears, and take risks. Personal style is important for an artist, but if you paint the same way year after year, a workshop can be the catalyst for a breakthrough. Investing in yourself reconfirms your commitment to who you are as an artist. Networking with an expert in your field as well as other students creates space for friendships and camaraderie that lasts long after the workshop ends." Given this attitude and the respect Brent developed for Kevin MacPherson (b. 1956) when he first read and then studied his book, *Fill your Paintings with Light and Color*, it was only natural that he signed up for a program with him in 2014. The following year he took a more intense workshop Kevin gave in Taos, New Mexico where he lives.

Brent very much enjoyed studying under both MacPherson and Mundy for both are not only respected artists and teachers but, "My own professional experience in the art world – where I had to know and practice the discipline associated with architectural illustration and thereafter developed my Impressionistic style – really

made me appreciate the fact that I was somewhere in between the creative discipline of MacPherson and the intuitive passion of Mundy."

Jensen's Paintings The Idea

Wherever Brent is in this spectrum, he, like all artists, has to somehow come up with an idea what to paint. His insights are interesting. "My compositions vary greatly because I paint what moves me. Too many times, I've come across a scene worthy of memorializing as an oil painting, but didn't stop to capture it in that moment. When returning, something changed (e.g. the weather, a building torn down, a field plowed). Ideas are everywhere. The key is slowing down enough to observe your surroundings. Then, it is imperative to make a decision. Excuses are plentiful, especially when plein air painting. When looking for a scene, I often give myself a time limit for scouting for it to avoid wasting painting time. Rarely, do you find a perfect scene. Another key is the importance of 'artistic license' and editing a scene. Whether you add something for interest or leave out an element in your painting that exists is the artist's prerogative. Taking this license and remembering, 'less is more' can transform a painting."

Notes From Brush Hill



"Rockport" • 20" x 24" • Oil

Composition and Execution

An idea is one thing, translating it into a painting is another. "Once you have the idea for a scene, finding the focal point is essential. That area will have the hardest edges to draw in the viewer. Loosely drawing the scene accurately while squinting to see values and shapes set the foundation for a memorable painting. The viewer's eyes are meant to fill in painting details. Too many details will rob the viewer of the opportunity to interpret a painting as they see it. Executing loose brush strokes

keeps a painting interesting and fresh even after years of daily viewing." In this context, Brent cites a technique C.W. Mundy terms "fracturing a painting." "This involves different methods to break up a painting to keep it interesting to the viewer. Fracturing is created through variations in brush work, use of a palette knife, and softening edges."

Once the idea is composed, Brent establishes the big shapes first and determines his lightest lights and darkest darks. "Create harmony by staying between those limits. Refinement is

achieved with the balance of detail execution without overworking the composition. Each brush stroke counts. Too many and the piece becomes muddy. Part way through, a scene may appear to be a "scraper" bound for the trash⁶. Often, perseverance transforms the painting into a worthwhile piece of art. Knowing when to push forward and when to stop is a balance worthy of mastery." He also recognizes the importance of giving one's brain a rest in order to look at the painting with fresh eyes. One way to do this is to use a small mirror in order to see it reversed – like a different painting. This surfaces both faults and strengths. Importantly, he says let the painting live its own life – be willing to follow it where it goes and have fun in the adventure.

Tools and Materials

Gamblin paints are Brent's brand of choice. "I typically use include Titanium White, Cadmium Yellow Light, Alizarin Crimson, Cadmium Red Medium and Ultramarine Blue. Color harmony is achieved by mixing a limited palette. A beginner's mistake is using too little paint on your canvas. Sometimes when teaching a workshop, one of the biggest breakthroughs for the students is the amount of paint they squeeze out of their tubes!"

As to brushes, he uses a combination of them on any one painting. "They vary from rounds, Filberts and brights and range in size from #2 to #10 for normalized paintings. For larger paintings, I use between a #6 flat up to a one-inch brush (#14 flat). Not only does the paint apply

(Footnotes)

⁶ The late ASMA Fellow Don Stone (1929-2015), the internationally known Impressionist Maine painter and life-long teacher, was once doing oil sketches of the ocean breaking at the foot of a cliff where he was painting. Unafraid to admit defeat, he would take the failed canvas-covered wooden panel off the easel and announce it was a "skimmer" – stated in his Downeast Maine accent (a "skim ma") - and fling it horizontally in a Frisbee circular motion style out to skim over the waves. It was a simple but indelible lesson for those observing it: One should be willing to recognize not all paintings are successful.

⁷ Some years ago in this column, I surveyed all of the Fellows about materials and brushes they preferred. The answers were all over the lot – many confessing that they simply stayed with what the first knew. However, to underscore Brent's point, there was one interesting treatment of brushes that I adopted that led to the longevity Brent refers to. First, I Velcro the ends of my handles so my brushes all hang down from my easel – gravity

works for the brush and against the natural tendency to splay the bristles when stored upright as in the "coffee can" approach. Secondly, use a readily available, multi-purpose bar soap made by a company founded in 1894, *Fels Naptha* ("used by ladies for shampoo and men to clean diesel engines"). It both thoroughly cleans the brush of any paint while respecting the well-being of the brush's hairs/bristles. And the third practice has proven to improve the longevity and functionality of the brush. After washing it thoroughly with *Fels Naptha* and rinsing it with water, dry it thermometer-style by flicking it firmly several times and then place some saliva in the palm of your hand, soak the brush with it and squeeze it out. Do this a couple of times and finally shape the brush back to the appearance it originally had when new. When dry, it will have the same shape and firmness as it did when new. I have well-used brushes that are over twenty years old.

⁸ *Cindy Salaski, Oil Painting with the Masters: Essential*

Techniques from Today's Top Artists, North Light Books, 2014, ISBN-10: 1440329931, ISBN-13: 978-1440329937, 160 Pages.

⁹ Including articles in: *International Artist.com*, December/January 2014, "Master Painters of the World: Plein Air Strategies," pp 98-99; *Southwest Art*, October 2013, "Artist to Watch," (Jensen also appeared in earlier issues of this magazine: July 2011, September 2009, and August 2006); *Art of the West*, September/October 2008, Feature Article by Mary Nelson, "A Leap of Faith," pp 60-65; *American Art Collector*, June, 2006, "This Plein Air Painter is Winning Collectors Hand over Fist," pp 200-203.

¹⁰ These are found on www.youtube.com and include: *Brent Jensen Marine Oil Paintings; The Dory; Amarante Bridge; Brent Jensen Oil Paintings with Significant Architecture; Autumn in France; and, Teton beyond the Aspens.*

quicker, it assists you in staying loose and is essential in creating soft edges. I find that brushes often get better with time. Some artists discard a brush about the time that brush would be reaching peak utilization in my work⁷. In addition to brushes, a palette knife is useful for detail work and creating hard edges in key areas of a painting."

Promotion of His Work

Since Brent Jensen set out to be a professional, full time artist ten years ago, he has been busy on several fronts and these activities have furthered his national and international recognition. In addition to ASMA, where his work has been juried into the last three National Exhibitions, Brent is a Signature Member of the American Impressionist Society and has actively shown in their annual National Juried Exhibitions. He is also a member of the Oil Painters of America and has exhibited with them. On other fronts, he is one of the featured artists in the book *Oil Painting with the Masters* that came out in 2014⁸. He has also enjoyed a favorable and diversified press in recent years⁹. He has also been active on the video front. These are easily accessed and enable the viewer to see a wide range of his work in various fields both domestically and internationally¹⁰. He is represented by the Christian Daniels Gallery in San Francisco, the Thornwood Gallery in Houston TX, the Waterhouse Gallery in Santa Barbara, CA and the Tirage Gallery in Pasadena, CA where he has an opening as this issue goes to press.

A Word to the Wise

Twenty-five years had lapsed between the time Brent began his art studies at the University of Utah and when he began fine art oil painting. Having learned this lesson, so costly in terms of time, he advises:

➤ Young artists should pursue their passion and not make my mistake.

➤ Paint daily. Even if the painting is a dud that day, it is a win. It's all about the mileage. The fact that you put paint to



"New England Harbor" • 24" x 30" • Oil

canvas builds your skill and is a worthy goal on its own.

➤ Be a life-learner. Whether through art book reference material, online video tutorials or workshops with respected artists, take steps to learn from others.

The Logical Decision

C.W.Mundy has become a mentor to Brent Jensen. It was he who suggested Brent consider joining the American Society of Marine Artists. "So I looked on line to see what the Society had to offer and found it was the perfect marriage since it combined my love of the sea and my love of art. I became a member several years ago and was elected Signature Member in 2016. I have come to respect and admire the Society for keeping the rich tradition of marine art and this country's important maritime history alive and growing. For me, with my own genealogy going back to Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century sailing ships, I am particularly appreciative of what the Society does." And Brent demonstrates this by active involvement in the Society, most recently addressing the crowd attending the opening of the *ASMA West Regional Exhibition* that debuted this past May at the Channel Island Museum in

Oxnard, CA. (See the photos on page 30 of the most recent Summer issue of the *ASMA News & Journal*.)

C. W. Mundy, an ASMA Fellow, is clearly pleased with Brent's progress and happy to have him aboard the ASMA ship as evidenced in this statement:

"Brent Jensen has successfully made the transition from narrative illustration to the simplicity of 'high art.' It satisfies his creative intuitiveness to be more involved with the processes and possibilities of creativity rather than the restrictiveness of the narrative.

Brent's willingness to do whatever it takes coupled with his passion and humility is an explosive recipe for success. He is truly a great and gifted Impressionist, which is what I think he has always wanted to be."



Charles Raskob Robinson is a Fellow of the Society. He paints at Brush Hill, a studio built in 1752, located in Washington, CT and formerly owned by Connecticut and New Mexico artist Eric Sloane. Some of Charlie's work may be seen on his website at: www.brushhillstudios.com.