

on Display

By Lisa Angle

Local artist paints the soul of the wild fields

Take a walk in the mountains, or a stroll along the estuary in Morro Bay. The same kind of peace and solitude you feel there can also be found in paintings by San Luis Obispo artist Robert Reynolds.

With today's society becoming more technical all the time, we sometimes forget to stop and appreciate our own relationship with nature. Our experiences with water and sky have a redemptive value, and capturing that is where Reynolds excels. "I feel those qualities that reaffirm a timeless, spiritual beauty are essential to our everyday lives," Reynolds says in his artist's statement. "It's important not to lose our connection with nature."

Reynolds' paintings offer scenes such as the tranquil surface of Morro Bay in "Morning Stillness." But the viewer gains more than a pretty image. Reynolds manages to convey the calmness of the ocean and the silence of the moment. It is the spirit of the place, not just the subject, that he has depicted.

Born and raised on the Central Coast, Reynolds has intimate knowledge of the landscapes he paints. "I have to know a place, and love a place, before I can capture it," he said. His respect for the essence of a location comes from his astute powers of observation.

In "Estuary Glow," the basis for the painting is the setting sun's effect on the sea and sky.



Landscapes by Robert Reynolds are on display at Johnson Gallery through May 9.

Reynolds sat in his car and studied the scene, committing it to memory, before going back to

the studio and putting it on canvas. The viewer gets the sense they are standing there themselves, smelling the breeze. Some people may not appreciate sunset paintings

because they think they are trite, but Reynolds said, "Any topic is fair game as long as the artist approaches the artistic experience with sincerity and conveys a truth about the subject," he wrote in the autumn 1997 issue of *Watercolor Magic*. It's the honesty he shows in the piece which makes it more than a

mere sunset.

Something else that makes Reynolds' work shine is his extensive knowledge of light, and how it influences objects. For

landscapes, he has spent years examining how light relates to clouds, fog, mist, dust and smoke. Whenever Reynolds is outdoors, whether he is hiking, sightseeing, or painting, he is

constantly observing. He often tells his students. "The more you study what's around you, the more valid your paintings will be."

As art professor emeritus at

Cal Poly, Reynolds has had the opportunity to go to England four times with the London Studies program, and it wasn't until the fourth trip that he felt moved to paint what he saw there. He had to feel the spirit of those places within himself before he could interpret them through art.

Reynolds is outstanding in his draftsmanship and his intuitive use of color, but it is his ability to portray the soul of the subject that makes his work glimmer. In "Stream of Azaleas" he gives us a place where we would like to sit and meditate on the shimmering reflection of leaves in the water. This is one of his two paintings selected to be included in the prestigious, biennial watercolor book "Splash 5: The Splendor of Color" — due out this spring from North Light Books. Reynolds' own book, "Painting Nature's Peaceful Places," has been a best seller for North Light Books.

Although Reynolds has brought the landscapes of the Central Coast to national attention through his watercolors, he has not exhibited locally in almost four years. So his show at Johnson Gallery through May 9 is a unique opportunity to view his paintings. Unfortunately, there wasn't enough room in the exhibit for his rarely seen figure work.

These days, Reynolds can be found in the wine country surrounding San Luis Obispo. He is out there examining the harvest and the fields — opening his heart to them. As the commemorative artist for the 1998 KCBX Wine Classic, he is sure to capture the true essence of the vineyards.

One of Reynolds' favorite quotes is from John Muir: "Whenever we go into the mountains, or indeed any of God's wild fields, we find more than we seek." Go into Johnson Gallery this month to see paintings by Reynolds and you may find more than you seek.

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