

Joseph Kleitsch: Abroad and At Home in Old Laguna

June 24th 2023 - September 24th, 2023

Exhibition Installation Assets - Vinyl Wall Text

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Joseph Kleitsch was an important California Impressionist painter who was born in Hungary in 1882. In 1902, at the age of nineteen, Kleitsch left Hungary and made his way to the United States. Much of Kleitsch's work in this early period was in the form of small still-life paintings, which could be sold cheaply and quickly while he concentrated on perfecting his portrait skills.

In 1920, Kleitsch and his wife Edna settled in Laguna Beach. A close friend of Edgar Payne (1883-1947), who was the first president of the Laguna Beach Art Association in 1918, Kleitsch was immediately welcomed into the organization. A sociable and admired artist, he knew many of the members including William Wendt (1865-1946) and Anna Hills (1882-1930).

Although he was well established as a portrait and still-life painter, Kleitsch was quite taken by the strong and clear light of Laguna Beach and started to paint landscapes and street scenes. One of these historic views is *The Old Post Office*, at the time located near the northeast corner of present-day Laguna Avenue and Coast Highway. The painting shows the front porch of Nicholas Isch's (1864-1951) general store that also served as the town's first post office.

In the summer of 1924, he painted several works at the Mission San Juan Capistrano. That same year, Kleitsch painted two nearly identical views of "downtown" Laguna titled Laguna Road I and Laguna Road II. These show just a few stores and buildings along the unpaved Coast Boulevard, today the Pacific Coast Highway. The road was finally paved in October 1926.

On February 6, 1926, Kleitsch sailed to Europe. He painted in Paris, Normandie and in Claude Monet's home village of Giverny and nearby Vernon. In Spain, he painted in Madrid and Seville. He also visited Italy, England, Austria, Hungary and Romania. He returned to America in November 1927. In all, he had been away for twenty-two months.

Joseph Kleitsch died at the age of forty-nine on November 16, 1931, in Santa Ana, California. He was struck down by a heart attack in front of the Santa Ana Courthouse and was laid to rest at the Angeles Abbey Memorial Park in Compton, California. Yet, his superb art lives on and with each passing year, his unique role as a chronicler of old Laguna adds to his standing among the very best of California's artists.

The Laguna Art Museum is grateful for the support of Thomas B. Stiles, II and Barbara Alexander Stiles; Historical Collections Council of California Art; Traditional Fine Arts Organization, Inc.; John and Patty Dilks; an Anonymous Donor; Michael, Sophia, and Julia Kelley; Diane Nesley; Linda and Jim Freund; Kevin Rowe and Irene Vlitos Rowe; Joe Ambrose; Rick Balzer; Dr. Kelley Tucker; Peter and Cathy Savage; Sue and Keith Colestock; Helen and Webster "Buzz" Kinnaird; Herb and Earlene Seymour; Laguna Beach Garden Club; Dr. Mark Judy; Mike Feddersen and Tom McClay; Eric Jessen; Herb and Earlene Seymour; James Taylor and Gary Conway; and the Laguna Beach Garden Club. We are also grateful to our corporate sponsors Bonhams and Uovo.

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